

LONDON READER

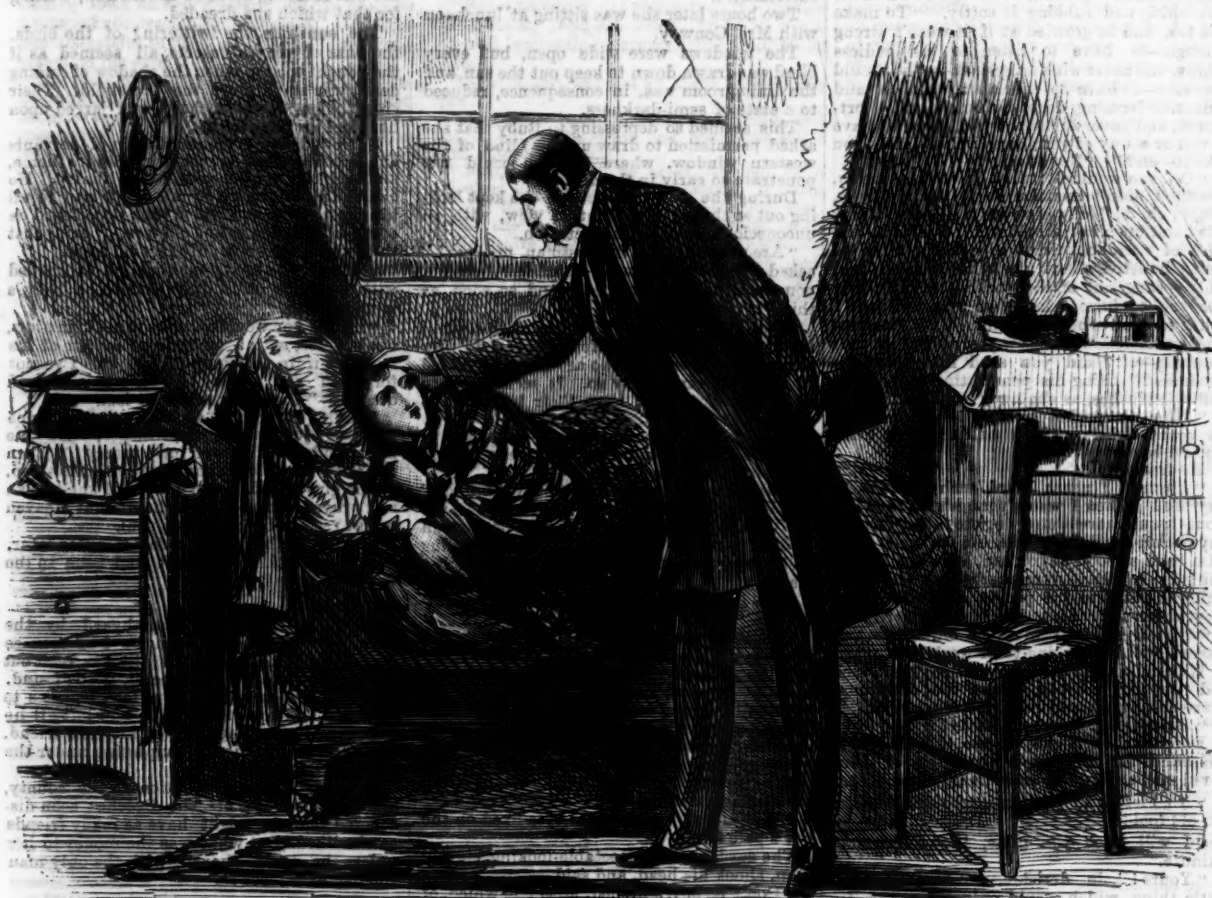
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["MY BLESSING IS WORTH NOTHING," SAID LORD ALVERLEY, AS HE LOOKED PITIFULLY INTO HER EAGER FACE.]

THE LOST STAR.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Mrs. CONWAY was much perturbed at Miss Howard's not returning from her morning walk till four o'clock in the afternoon; and when she came into the drawing-room, after divesting herself of her hat and jacket, with heavy eyes and colourless cheeks, the old lady made up her mind that this should be the very last hunting excursion in which she would allow her companion to join.

She said as much to the Squire when he came in for his cup of tea; but he pook-pooed her anxiety, and said a slip of a girl like Ruby Howard would be all the better for a run like that.

Whilst this conversation was going on downstairs, Ruby was lying on her bed with a nervous headache. As she tossed from side to side, unable to find rest in any position, she kept asking herself if she had been a fool—a right-down fool—or little less than a saint?

Marriage with Lord Alverley was as im-

possible now as it had ever been. She was still in a dependent position—still utterly penniless—still under the suspicion of a slur. Lord Chester would not tolerate such a match for his son; and Lord Alverley himself—though she loved him all the more for his utter contempt of these drawbacks—if she gave into his wish, would wake some day to find he had made a great mistake.

She could have been content—yes, content—knowing that she had done right, if only she had not been obliged to seem faithless, in order to persuade him to go. It was so terribly hard to help him to un-love her, when his love was the one anchor to which she had always been able to cling in the roughest storms of life. Now she must bend to the blast in resigned submission, for it was worse than useless to try to make head against it.

Time passed on, spring came quickly on the heels of winter, and summer followed, sprinkling the earth with beauty and gladness. On a glorious morning in June, Ruby caught up a large shady hat and strolled across the lawn, in search of flowers for the vases.

Bees were humming on every side, stooping

every now and then to sip the honey from lily or rose. It seemed to the sorrowful girl wending her way through life with quiet patience, as she watched the play of the insects, the volatile butterfly—loving and leaving quick as the seconds flew—the ardent bee, staying just long enough to gather all the sweetness on its way—as if everything in inanimate Nature had its love and its lover, except herself.

She picked a spray of honeysuckle, and fastened it in the front of her dress, pricking her finger with the pin.

"Fancy all that pain and trouble over a trampy flower like that!" said a cheery voice behind her, and looking round she saw the Squire with a great bunch of dewy roses in his hand. "See what I have brought you!"

"Oh! how lovely!" burying her face in them with keen appreciation. "Are they all for me?"

"Everyone of them. I picked them myself, because I knew you were always hankering after them; and I thought they were better given than stolen—eh!"

"Now I shall know what you expect of me;

and I'll take care you are not disappointed," with a saucy look up into his face.

"So long as you come to 'The Beeches,' I don't much mind what you come for. The house seems like a barn when you're not in it. I think," with a good-natured chuckle, "I shall start a companion for myself, and ask Mrs. Conway if she isn't tired of hers. What do you say to that?"

"You are very rude to suggest that she could be!"

"How should you like to come and live with the old man?" putting his rough hand under her chin, and rubbing it softly. "To make his tea, and be growled at if it wasn't strong enough—to have to listen to his endless yarns, and never wink an eyelash lest he should be cross—to have to talk about turnips and scientific farming, dogs and horses, and short-horns, and never to know what it was to have a will or a way of your own? How should you like it—eh?" "Not at all!"

"Oh, you wouldn't; then I won't ask you. Lucky I didn't mention it to the old lady. Ruby, child!" changing his tone, and laying his hand upon her shoulder, "I don't like the idea of the daughter of my dear old friend being buffeted about the world as if she had only sprung out of the workhouse. It's time for you to have a home of your own, and I want to know when it's coming? How about that young fellow who saw you back from your hunting—why did you send him about his business?" fixing his penetrating eyes on her tell-tale blushes, as she hung her head.

"When the pocket is empty"—and she tried to speak lightly—"it is well that the heart should be empty too!"

He frowned.

"Absurd! I never heard such nonsense in my life! When I was a youngster, a face like yours would have been enough to fill my heart—my pocket—and my whole life as well. Call him back as soon as you can, and send him to me; he shall have your pretty face, and something to put into his pocket as well. There now, cheer up! Alex. Mackinlay's word is as good as a bond. I must be off, or the lady rascals will be thinking their work!"

Waving his hand, he opened a gate which led into the paddock, where the buttercups were shining amongst the rich long grass.

"Have you got your umbrella?"

Ruby ran to the gate to see if he had it in his hand, for he was in the habit of using a red one, as large as an ordinary-sized tent.

"No, I left it somewhere in the stables—like an old fool!"

"I will fetch you mine, if you'll wait a minute."

"Yours!" in derision. "A nonsensical little thing, which would only cover the tip of my nose. No, no, it's not my complexion I'm thinking of; so when I come across a cabbage leaf I'll stick it in my hat."

"Don't forget, because the sun is like a furnace!" she said, anxiously.

"A mere flea-bite to what I've been accustomed to—where they can roast a slice of beef, and boil a drop of water, in less than five minutes by setting it out in the sun."

With a nod of his head, the Squire walked off, a thorough picture of an old-fashioned country gentleman in his tight, leather gaiters and short brown coat, as he skirted the edge of the paddock, where some thorn trees cast a welcome shade over the grass.

And Ruby stood still to look after him, shading her eyes with her hand, because she had taken off her hat to fill it with his roses.

Her mourning being over, she was dressed in a pale blue cambric, which was infinitely becoming to her soft and delicate colouring.

With the flowers in her hand, and the sunshine resting on her bright brown hair, turning it into gold, she looked like an impersonation of the beauty and freshness of the lovely summer's morning. But her eyes were very wistful as they followed the Squire's burly figure over the crushed buttercups; and she had half a mind to run after him, and tell

him how grateful she was to him for all his kindness.

"But why stop him now? I can do it just as well this evening."

And with this reflection she hurried across the mowed lawn, and gathered the rest of the flowers hastily, so as to make up for lost time.

But when she picked a rosebud—she thought she would give it to the Squire for his button-hole—and when she pricked her fingers, she smiled to think how he would laugh at her carelessness.

Two hours later she was sitting at luncheon with Mrs. Conway.

The windows were wide open, but every blind was drawn down to keep out the sun, and the dining-room was, in consequence, reduced to a state of semi-darkness.

This seemed so depressing to Ruby that she asked permission to draw up the blind of the western window, where the sun could not penetrate so early in the day.

During the rest of luncheon she kept looking out at the small amount of view, with an unconscious feeling of expectation.

"Are you expecting the postman, my dear?" asked Mrs. Conway with a smile; "because, you know, he never comes round so soon as this."

"No, I never have any letters," with a small sigh. "And what a comfort it is! I do pity the poor fellows who are always harassed by them wherever they go. It seems so hard that they should not have their holidays untroubled."

"The post cannot be kept off the door of a gentleman's house," said Mrs. Conway, smiling at her.

"Mrs. Conway, there's somebody coming!" and Ruby started nervously to her feet.

"Well, my dear, I have known people run before," said the old lady, composedly taking up her spectacles to inspect the messenger as he passed.

"He is talking to the postman and pointing towards the window," they have let the money into the paddock again, and my hat goes in being eaten up as fast as it can!"

"Shall I go and meet?" and Ruby, unable to account to herself for the excessive anxiety she felt, pushed aside her chair without waiting for the answer, and ran out breathless with eagerness, through the open window into the glaring sunshine.

"What is it?" with eager eyes fixed on the boy's pale face.

The gardener, a respectable-looking, elderly man, shook his head, and said—

"Don't be frightened, Miss!" which, of course, terrified her exceedingly; whilst the boy, with a great gulp, as if he were swallowing his tears, pointed across the shining meadows to the road beyond, where a small procession was seen carrying some heavy burden slowly towards The Beeches. "It's the Squire, mum. They are bringing of him home!"

Ruby pressed her hand to her heart, and turned so cold that her teeth chattered in the scorching sun.

"What has happened? Was it an accident?"

"A stroke, they say. But he's awful bad, as near dead as I ever saw," rubbing his eyes with the back of his hand.

Her mind reverted instantly to everything that would be needed in such an emergency.

"A doctor!" she said, hoarsely; "has he been sent for?"

"Aye! He's been sent for, but they say it will be all up with him before he gets to the house."

Mrs. Conway had come out and was standing on the gravel-path, wringing her hands.

"I must go," said Ruby, pantingly. "I must see him before—"

She would not finish her sentence, but flew like a wild thing down the short shrubbery, across the road, up the avenue of fine old

beeches to the stately house which had been Alex. Mackinlay's desolate home.

She looked round the hall with dazed eyes. Trophies of the chase were hung on every side. There was the hunting-crop which he would never use again; the horn—the blinding tears came into her eyes, she could see no more. The house seemed empty, for all the servants had poured out of it at the first news of the disaster to their master.

How long she waited she never knew, but it seemed as if a whole year had passed whilst she was standing alone in the old hall, waiting for that which she dreaded.

The sunshine, the twittering of the birds, the buzz of playful insects, all seemed as if they ought to stop when the shadow of coming death was standing on the threshold. Their cheerfulness was a mockery, and jarred upon her grief-stricken heart.

Surrounded by a mournful train of servants and tenants, they brought the Squire home, and laid him on the sofa in the library. He had endeared himself in his rough way to all his dependants, and stifled sobs were heard on every side, as young and old were grieving that they would see his kindly face no more.

Suddenly the heavy eyes opened, and rested with a glance of fond recognition on Ruby's troubled face.

"Child! you wouldn't come to me!" in a low, weak voice, with a tremulous motion of his hand, as if in search of hers. "But I've not forgotten you. Care for the horses, and don't—" the last words were lost.

Reading over him as his lips moved once more, she just caught the whisper, "Lay me to her side, and Heaven have mercy!" Then the tired eyes closed and he seemed to sleep, as the girl knelt down to tend of him, and prayed with her whole heart that Heaven might receive his departing soul.

The doctor hurried in a few minutes later, but Alex. Mackinlay's spirit had gone to the God who gave it!

They laid him in the churchyard by the side of the wife from whom he had been so long parted; and when his will was read out in the library after the funeral, it was found, that with the exception of a few legacies to servants and old tenants, he had left all he possessed to the daughter of his old friend, Sir Robert St. Heliers, now passing under the name of Ruby Howard.

It made a great sensation in the county, and the heiress of The Beeches soon discovered that she might have as many friends as she liked. But what was the money to her unless she could share it with the only man she had ever loved?

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

When Lord Alverley arrived in London, after his unexpected meeting and unsatisfactory parting with Ruby St. Heliers, he was in a towering passion. Too much of a gentleman ever to show temper to a woman, it had only grown in strength because of the strong curb he had been obliged to put upon it, and it showed itself in an utter recklessness of appearances, which surpassed the follies of the past. He threw himself into every form of dissipation which could help him to drive her image from his memory. Flung heavily on the Derby and the Oaks, he lost a heap of money, and had recourse to the Jews to help him out of his difficulties. Of course they only increased rather than diminished his entanglements; and when he applied to his father for an advance, Lord Chester simply replied—

"Don't be a fool any longer, my son. My money is gone, and let me hear no more of your want of money!"

He refused however to flirt with Imogen Deyncourt for the purpose of keeping his creditors quiet, although he had got into the habit of frequenting her mother's house in Eaton-square pretty often.

One evening when he had dropped in, after

a very able political dinner, Miss Deyncourt invited him into the small conservatory at the back of the drawing-room, to see a new specimen-geranium. Thoroughly bored and disgusted with life in general, he was in a mood ripe for any mischief, and his eyes shone with a sudden fire beneath their drooping lashes.

After he had declared the geranium a fraud, Miss Deyncourt sank down on a low velvet seat, and moved her dress so that he might take the place beside her. He did as she intended, and leant his arm on the back of it, looking down at her majestic beauty without a scrap of admiration in his glance. Her style was distasteful to him, and her metallic voice grated on his ears.

She remained silent for a while, playing with the variegated leaves of a creeper, feeling that his eyes were upon her, and thinking that her present half-reclumbent position showed off her personal charms to advantage. Suddenly she remarked: "That *protégé* of yours, Miss St. Heliers, what has become of her? She came to a bad end—did she not?"

"It *she* had been a *protégé* of mine, she might speaking very slowly, and with a slight frown; but, fortunately for her, she would have nothing to say to me. What could have put such an absurd idea—excuse me, but it was so truly absurd—into your head?"

"Yourself, and a romantic story some one told me. Why you nearly risked losing your arm by flying down to Chester Chase!"

"So I am forbidden to go and see my father and mother?" with raised eyebrows.

"Not at all! but you cannot hope to blind me when circumstances are so dead against you."

"What circumstances?" with an air of indifference.

"Bobby Grenville, my cousin, you know, met an evening train at Baddington on one occasion, and saw a charming *tableau* as he stood upon the platform!" smiling maliciously. "There you were, in a fainting state, with the loveliest girl imaginable, as he said, bending over you!"

"Was it you?" very quietly. "You know I had my eyes shut so I couldn't see!"

"You humming! What was she doing when you opened them?"

"Nothing was there but the hairy visage of Phillips—useful certainly, but not romantic! The next time I faint, I will do it with one eye open."

"But and if I am there I will pour a little eau de Cologne into it. But tell me, why is she under a cloud?"

"For the same reason as the sun—she means to come out soon and surprise us."

"But what has she done?"

"Engaged herself to be married, I believe. Is that a crime?"

"Not to you?" breathlessly; something in his manner striking her as strange.

"No! I wish to Heaven she had!" with sudden vehemence.

"What! an insignificant little governess, who left your father's house in such a hurry that there were all sorts of queer stories about her!" she exclaimed, with sparkling eyes.

He rose to his feet and looked down at her, with such contempt in his half-closed eyes as stung her to the quick. "Poor child! After all she is not insignificant enough to escape a woman's spite!"

"It is not spite—only facts are facts!"

"Facts distorted become the most mischievous of fictions," he said, sternly. "Miss St. Heliers left Chester Chase because, I am afraid, my people were not altogether kind to her. I think Clem was a little jealous of her; and my father—with a shrug of his shoulders—"was, as usual, prejudiced. But I heard him myself beg her to stay; and my mother and the children were in tears."

"And you?" with a little scornful laugh.

The laugh roused him to sudden passion. His eyes glittered as he answered, haughtily,—

"If you are curious to know, I will tell you."

I followed her to the station—and asked her to be my wife!"

She bit her lip, and flushed crimson.

"And perhaps you will tell me that she refused you?"

"She did!"

"But why! It would have been a splendid match for her?"

"Yes!" he said, slowly, but with concentrated bitterness. "A fair enough match, if Alverley himself had been left out of the bargain!"

"Some people would rather have it—with, not without," and she looked up at his worn, but still fascinating features, with a softening glance.

"Some might, but not an angel without one spot!"

With a low bow he left her abruptly, and walked out of the room, and down the stairs with a hurried step.

"Ruby! Ruby!" he cried, though in a voiceless appeal to the silent stars. It could not be that she was lost to him for ever. Surely she had never loved a new friend down in Berkshire better than himself! It was not likely—scarcely possible, indeed. He had seen the love-light in her eyes the day that she passed him at the door when she was leaving the Chase, and again when he had caught her in his arms, when she was slipping down the bank into that thrice-blessed lane. Perhaps, after all, she was deceiving him for his good—as she might fancy. It was just like her own unselish nature to sacrifice herself again and again.

A gleam of hope darted through his heart, and the next morning, at an unusually early hour, he started for the peaceful village of Sunnydale.

He drove straight to the Poplars, and leaving the fly at the gate, walked quickly up the gravel-drive, and knocked at the front-door. Every blind was down, and a presentiment of failure depressed his spirits. He was not surprised at receiving no answer; but the gardener came hobbling round the corner, and asked him what he wanted.

"Can you tell me where Miss St. Heliers is?" slipping some money into the old man's horny hand.

"Never heard the name, sir. Our lady is away from home, visiting, and she calls herself Mrs. Conway!"

"Yes! but there was a young lady living with her not long ago. Surely you can't have forgotten her?"

"Oh, yes, a young lady—a sort of governess or companion!"

"Yes—yes!" impatiently, tapping the gravel with his cane.

"But she is a grand lady now"—Lord Alverley's heart sank—"with horses and carriages of her own—mistress of The Beeches, as fine a place as you would see, this side of Berkshire."

"Ah! when did it happen?" thinking of the imaginary wedding.

"As near as I can mind me, nigh upon a month ago," alluding to the Squire's death.

"It took many of us by surprise, but she's a real lady now, and as rich as—the Pope!"

"And what is her name?" hoarsely.

"Howard! If you have a wish to see her 'tis but five minutes' walk, and I'll be glad to show you the way, sir."

Alverley looked at the distant gables, and shuddered.

"Thanks; I'm in a hurry!"

With a slight nod he walked slowly down to the gate; and, getting into the fly, told the coachman to drive back to the station.

His friend, Lord Fielding, with whom he had been staying on that memorable day when Vixen dropped her shoe, had deserted Berkshire for Rotten Row and Hurlingham; and his love for Ruby was too sincere to make him wish—at present at least—to appear as a marplot in the midst of her newly-found happiness.

So he hurried back to town with useless haste, whilst the old gardener wondered every

time he scratched his head. "What an odd sort of cove the gentleman must be to go off so quick 'cos he heard a young lady was rich! A few shiners in the pocket in a general way made the sweethearts stick a bit the closer."

Mrs. Howard, of The Beeches, Sunnydale! How strange it seemed to think that his own little Ruby had settled down as the wife of some country squire, who probably had no ideas beyond short-horns and horses. She said she was happy, so he was bound to believe it; but there was something very peculiar about the whole affair, for she had almost sworn that she would not be the wife of any man till the lost star was traced. Why was this Mr. Howard to be an exception to the rule? Was he so surpassingly fascinating that all her steadfast resolutions had broken, like egg-shells, before his irresistible power? He must be a new comer at any rate, because his name had not once been mentioned by Fielding!

Lord Alverley speculated thus, as he sat in the second row of the stalls at the Alhambra, with his eyes abstractedly fixed on a new and marvellous ballet. When the dancing was over, he strolled behind the scenes to look for a friend. Being in no humour for talking nonsense, even with the fairest of the *corymbes*, and not being able to discover the man he was in search of, he turned away, with the intention of leaving the theatre, when a pretty girl, robed in airy garments of light and sparkle, tapped him on the arm with a silver wand.

"Lord Alverley, I think?"

"At your service!" he answered, with a smile, looking down with evident admiration at her baby face.

"Do you remember Anna Gower?" hastily, as if she had no time to wait.

"Not does she dance as charmingly as you do?"

"I don't know," indifferently. "You mayn't have seen her, as she belongs to the last row but one!"

"Then if I never saw her, how could I possibly remember her?" with raised eyebrows.

"Not here, but in your own home. She was a servant at Chester Chase; and I thought you knew her very well. She's right down mad about you!"

"Ah! I know. There was a good-looking girl—rather Jewish, with heavy dark eyes. Mad about me? That's very kind of her, for I don't remember ever speaking to her in my life. How long has she taken to this sort of thing?" with a glance in the direction of the stage.

"About a year, I think; but she was never good at it, and she can't bear being scolded. Now she's very ill, poor thing—dying—and if you want to see her, there is no time to be lost!"

"Want to see her?" his eyes opening wide with astonishment. "I assure you I haven't the smallest desire; but if she is ill, and in want of funds"—putting his hand into his pocket where coins were rather scarcer than they used to be—"perhaps you will be kind enough—"

"Nothing of the sort!" and she stamped her foot impatiently. "She doesn't want your money, but yourself. I think she has got something weighing upon her mind about a governess she was jealous of, and got into mischief."

An instantaneous change came over his listless face.

"Where does she live?"

She mentioned the name of a street in the neighbourhood of Covent-garden, adding,—

"If you are a Christian you will go to her at once. Good gracious! there's the bell!"

"One moment! When can I see her?"

"To-night, she is alive—to-morrow, she may be—"

With an expressive shrug of her shoulders, she fluttered away, and was lost amongst a crowd of dancers.

"Too bad of you, Alverley, and she's out."

and-out the prettiest of the lot!" cried Lord Fielding, slapping him on the back.

"Keep your chaff for to-morrow. I'm off!" and, suiting the action to the word, Lord Alverley nodded, and disappeared with a celerity that surprised his friend.

"Something's up!" he muttered, as he lounged against a painted tree, with his hands in his pocket. "But I'm hanged if I can guess what it is. I never saw him walk so fast before!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

In a miserable lodging not far from Leicester-square a girl lay at the point of death. Her large eyes, shining with the unnatural lustre of fever, were fixed upon the pale, aristocratic face of the young Viscount, with a passionate intensity of expression which revealed the secret love she had so long cherished in the depths of her wild and foolish heart. It was a madness, and it brought her to this!

"And you saw this man at Chester Chase, on the day that the diamonds were missing?" said Lord Alverley, speaking very slowly, in order that she might understand him better.

"Yes! Time after time he begged and prayed of me, to let him come and see me in the house; and that day, when most of the gentry and half the servants were out, I let him in by the side door. We was just talking together in the passage, when I heard Mrs. Nicholson coming; and afraid of the scolding she was sure to give me, I shut him up in the housemaid's closet, on the stairs. When I came back—for she kept me a long time, a-grumbling about the dusting—he was gone!"

"And you never saw him again?"

Anna had sunk back on her pillow, her breath came in stertorous gasps, and the drops of utter exhaustion gathered on her forehead.

Moved with compassion for her blighted girlhood, and dreadfully afraid lest she should die with her story uncompleted, Lord Alverley looked round for some restorative; but there was neither eau-de-Cologne nor sal-volatile to be found on the rickety table—only a little water in a dirty glass.

Wiping the glass with his delicate pocket-handkerchief, he put it to her lips. She drank with feverish eagerness, and seemed revived. Putting her hand to her forehead, with a dazed look, she tried to recover the thread of her thoughts.

"You never saw him again?" repeated Lord Alverley.

"I looked high and low for him, till I was in a terrible fright, and at last I found him coming out of the Countess's bed-room, with his hand inside his coat. I asked what business he had up there, and tried to get him down the back-stairs; but he broke away from me, and stood outside the schoolroom door, listening. 'I hear her voice!' he said, over and over again, quite daft-like. I took him by the arm, and dragged him away, and glad enough I was to shut the door behind him!"

"And, knowing this, you kept it back, and let an innocent girl be suspected in his place?"

"Was she innocent? I saw her there, at the door of my lady's room—leastways, coming from it—with my own eyes!" sitting up in her eagerness, and dragging an old black shawl over her shoulders.

"She was not there!"—very sternly—"I know it for a certainty. Don't you believe me?"

"Aye, I believe you," wearily; "if you said I was a good girl, I'd try to think it true!"

"You will be good," gently, "if you do your best to repair your fault. What could have made you wish to harm an angel like Miss St. Helliers?"

Although so near the point of death the evil passions which had been so long cherished in the girl's untutored breast flashed from her eyes.

"I hate her!" she said, with clenched teeth.

"You hate her?" in surprise, as he drew back with sudden aversion.

"Oh, don't look at me like that!" and she clutched at his sleeves with eager fingers, "don't, now—oh! quick, let me tell you all—before I go! They told me you were ill, and then you came to the theatre. You would not look at me—but I watched you growing thinner and sadder as the time went on—and I knew it was all along of her."—Lord Alverley started—"and the thought came into my mind that I could help you, so I got Fred to show me his treasures—such a heap of queer things—and amongst them was my lady's star, shining so awful bright, as if it was a big eye watching me."

Here she stopped and panted for breath.

"I've thought of it all—you must get a star made of glass, just like it, and then you must take it with you, and say I sent you to look at his pretty things. Then you can take my lady's star, and slip the other in its place!"

"I see!" with a grave nod. "Where is he to be found?"

"Just round the corner, No. 29."

There was a pause, during which she fixed her eyes once more on Alverley's face with a haunting stare.

"When you have made it right," hoarsely, "shall you marry her?"

"No," in a low, sad voice; "she is married already."

A spasm of joy flitted across the girl's wasted features.

He rose from his seat.

"All this ought to be put down in black and white. Shall you have any objection to signing a deposition, if I ask my lawyer to call on you to-morrow?"

"To-morrow! Oh, where shall I be to-morrow?" And, with a convulsive shudder, she hid her face in the tattered shawl.

Lord Alverley, careless man of the world as he was, scarcely knew what to say; but he bowed his head reverently, and muttered,—

"In Heaven's hands, my poor girl!"

"And—and you won't curse me for what I've done?" with earnest entreaty in her eyes.

"I shall bless you for what you have done this day!"

"Then lay your hand upon my head, and bless me now?"

"My blessing is worth nothing," he said, gravely; but he laid his hand upon her rough black locks, and looked pitifully and tenderly into her eager face. His touch seemed to soothe her ruffled spirit, and she lay back with closed eyes. Suddenly she opened them.

"No harm must come to Fred. He is daft—quite daft—and means no harm to others."

"He shall be taken care of, that I promise you. Now, good-night! Have you had a doctor?" looking round the bare room, compassionately.

"No; he couldn't cure me, and I didn't care to live! If I might have followed you, like a dog, wherever you went, it would have been different. I wanted nothing from you—only to see your face as I see it now, with the kindest smile in the world. Oh, Heaven! but it's hard to die!" with a sudden moan.

"My poor child, think of Heaven. I am not worth a thought. Can I find your landlady anywhere? I want to speak to her."

"If you find her, she'll be tipsy; so whatever you have got to say, you had better tell it to me," looking up with failing eyes into the face that had been like a wandering star in her life, and led her fancy astray.

"Only this," he said, hurriedly, as he deposited some money on the table. "I want you to have all you want—doctor's medicines, creams and jellies—whatever you seem to fancy."

"You are kind!" with a piteous sigh, "but I shall be gone to-morrow!" She laid her hand on her heart, whilst her lips turned ashen grey. "Say you've been a good girl, Anna, and let me have your hand."

He gave her his hand with a pitying smile

and she pressed it to her burning lips. Then he stooped, and, moved with sudden pity, touched her forehead with his moustaches.

A radiant look shot across the girl's handsome face.

"You've been a good girl, Anna," he said, softly, and she seemed to hang upon the words. Then she turned over on her side, with a smile upon her lips, as he walked slowly across the room, and went out of the door.

On the stairs he met the landlady, not quite as tipsy as usual, and gave her some directions for Anna's comfort, which she promised to obey, being much impressed by the aspect of her lodger's late visitor.

The next morning he went down to Lincoln's Inn, and asked the solicitor to get Anna's deposition signed as soon as possible; and then drove off to Scotland-yard to get a warrant for the arrest of Frederick Gibson, which was not to be fused except in case of absolute necessity.

Two policemen in plain clothes watched the house during the day, and when it was dusk Lord Alverley, disguised in a discarded coat of Phillips', and with a loose handkerchief round his neck, hiding ever y scrap of snow-white linen, dismissed his hansom at the corner; and walking slowly down the street, with half-closed eyes, which saw everything at a glance, rang the bell at No. 29, and asked for Mr. Godson.

A slatternly maid, with curl-papers in her hair, opened the door, and said that Godson was to be found in the "two pair-back."

Smiling to himself at these curt directions, Lord Alverley groped his way up a dusty staircase, and knocking his forehead against an unseen door, proceeded to rap on it with his stick.

"Come in, can't you, without all that row?" cried an impatient voice from the inside. The invitation was readily accepted, and Lord Alverley walked in, to find himself in a very stuffy room, with a faded carpet, a greeny-yellow paper, and an atmosphere of smoke. When the smoke cleared away he saw a long-whiskered face, with a pipe in its mouth, staring at him with wide, open eyes, and presently that it belonged to the owner of the apartment, who, arrayed in a tattered dressing-gown, was lounging at full length on a drab sofa.

"What brings you here?" he asked, suspiciously, with a furtive glance at a black bag in the corner of the room, but without any change of attitude. "There's nothing to see here; and if there was, you ain't going to see it."

"Then Anna Gower was mistaken?" said Lord Alverley, drawing an arm-chair opposite the sofa, and opolly throwing himself into it. "Excuse my sitting down, but I'm tired. Have a weed?" offering his silver-mounted cigar-case.

Godson's eyes glittered, and he stretched out his hand with the eagerness of an impoverished smoker, who has long been obliged to do without the best tobacco.

"Your tobacco's real first-shop, sir!" he said, admiringly. "May I ask how much this sort of weed is a piece?"

"I really can't tell; the sum is too much for my brain. I buy them at so much a thousand."

"And how long does it take you to get through a lot like that?" he went on, with the foolish curiosity of a weak brain.

"I don't smoke by rule, so I couldn't tell."

"I can tell you how many pipes I have a day, so I am sharper than you are!" and he looked at the tip of his cigar with a chuckle.

"Of course you are! How many do you have?"

"One; because when I begin, I never stop!" bursting into a loud laugh.

"Ah! that's a capital way of reckoning. No one can say that one is too much." A little more desultory conversation, and then Lord Alverley turned round, saying, "Have another?"

To his surprise his cigar-case was gone. He had placed it there for the purpose of testing

Godson's mania, but he could have sworn that it was not possible for him to have touched it, without his seeing it.

Much puzzled, and rather amused, he stooped down, pretending to look for it. Godson seemed distressed at its loss, and helped in the search with great zeal.

"Just tell me your name and address, sir; and if I find it after you've gone, I'll send it after you!"

"Wilfred Penraven, Carlton Club," relying on his Christian names not being known.

"Penraven!" said the other, thoughtfully. "I don't call to mind anyone of that name before! Who was it you said sent you to me?"

"Your friend, Anna Gower. Look here, Mr. Godson, I won't say anything more about my case, if you'll agree to show me your curiosities—it's disappearance is unaccountable!"

"Not at all; it's all that chair you are sitting on, sir! There must be a hole in the leather. A gentleman who was here the other day lost his watch in the same way."

"Oh! very well; I'll change it," and Alverley, with the utmost gravity, took another seat.

"Now for the curiosities. I have a small collection myself——"

"Will you let me see them?" eagerly, as he went slowly into the corner and fetched a black bag.

"Some day, perhaps!" thinking to himself he would keep a sharp eye upon him if he did.

Very reluctantly Godson emptied the contents of the bag upon the shabby green cloth. It was a miscellaneous collection of articles, amusing because of their utter incongruity with each other.

A silver card-case, a penny whistle, a packet of pins, a gold brooch, a hair-bracelet, a solitary white kid glove, a pair of brass snuffers, scissors, thimbles, reels of silk, cork-screws, silver chains, an ivory shoe-horn, ivory tablets, various purses, earrings, a pair of skates, &c.

"Have you nothing else? I don't think so much of it, after all!" said Alverley, contemptuously. "I thought from what Anna said, you had something really startling in the way of jewellery!"

"Did she speak of it, naughty girl? That's private!"

"Yes, you may as well let me see it. You really must, you know, as I've lost my cigar-case."

"You mustn't tell anyone!" looking round suspiciously. "Now you won't, will you?"

"Tell anyone! why should I? Be quick and empty the bag. Shall I help you?"

"No; hands off! I say. If you are going to touch it you shan't have a sight of it!" catching it up from the table and turning his back.

"After all, I almost think I had better call a policeman to help me look for my case!" taking one step towards the door.

"No! no! no!" exclaimed the other, in the extremity of terror. "Here, you shall see it; you're a good fellow, I'm sure!"

With nervous fingers he extracted a small packet from the deepest recesses of the bag, and hastily undoing its innumerable wrappers, placed the Countess of Chester's lost star upon the table!

(To be continued.)

It is but a little the wisest of us can know or the ablest of us can do. Modesty is becoming all, and it is the handmaid of truth; but neither truth nor modesty requires us to fear or to shun any knowledge, however small. Let us rather welcome it gladly, only endeavouring to add to it with every opportunity, and to hold it simply at its real worth.

Editing a newspaper in Japan is evidently rather a difficult matter. One native journal recently appeared with a large blank space, for which the editor apologised by stating that at the last moment he found that what he had written for that space was entirely wrong, and must be left out. Accordingly he had no time to obtain matter to fill the vacant columns.

A FRIEND.

THERE is not in all our language,
Though we search from end to end,
Word of truer, deeper meaning
Than the simple one of "friend."

Yet how often we abuse it,
And how hard it is to know
Whether one we've loved and trusted
Will remain a friend or no.

Thus the heart is always seeking
For the one who will not prove
Recreant to all our trusting,
But return us love for love.

We need one in whom the shadow
Of a doubt can ne'er arise—
One we know will understand us
Just by looking in our eyes.

One to whom the heart turns ever
As the flowers to the sun—
One who shares our joys and sorrows,
Pardons all the wrongs we've done.

Knows the hopes that we have cherished,
Knows our aims for future years,
Knows our sins, for which repentance
Has been bought with bitter tears.

Of the ties the world deems nearest
Cannot give us such a friend;
Of some heart to us the dearest
Seems a stranger to life's end.

But, alas! the deepest sorrow
That our hearts can ever know
May by that same friend be given,
Who has proved our bitterest foe.

So our faith grows ever weaker,
Till we say and think it true,
"What is life when friends betray us?
What is left for us to do?"

"Life is real, life is earnest,"
Rings the old heart-thrilling strain.
Many duties still are left us—
Life's sweet flowers may bloom again.

S. W. P.

WILFUL, BUT LOVING.

CHAPTER XV.

THE 30th of March came. A crowded audience thronged every seat in the Prince's Opera House.

Mr. Gordon was in a fever of anxiety; he himself believed implicitly in Mademoiselle D'Arcy's genius. But the debut of a new artist was always a trying ordeal, and in this case popular interest had been largely excited. It was known that the *prima donna* was English. It was rumoured that she was of humble birth, and curiosity had been raised to its highest pitch.

There is no need for us to dwell on that evening—no need to tell how Michael D'Arcy's prophecy was fulfilled; how the girl who had come to the opera house unknown, undried, left it amid the plaudits of a crowd of aristocracy.

The musician placed his niece in the shabby cab that was waiting for them, fastened her cloak more closely round her; for the night was bitterly cold, and then taking his place at her side, they commenced their drive in perfect silence.

Michael D'Arcy was touched to the heart at the apathy of the girl's manner. He had known for a long time that there was a secret in her life—a closed chamber in her heart—but he had thought such success as this would have atoned for all.

And now when her triumph was certain, when the manager himself had congratulated

and thanked her, when a crowd of floral trophies reposed on the seat opposite her, there was no joy on her face, no light in her eyes, she sat calm and still, almost as a marble statue.

"Beatrice!"

His voice moved her. It was characteristic of the girl that she never forgot a kindness shown her—that she clung to this man, who had befriended her in her distress, with a grateful affection almost filial.

She turned to him with a smile.

"Are you satisfied?"

"Satisfied is no word for it! I am surprised, delighted! Beatrice, do you know what you have done? To-morrow your name will be in everyone's mouth! You will be the darling of the musical world!"

She raised her blue eyes to his face.

"How do people feel when they succeed?"

"Glad, excited, and happy!"

She shook her head.

"I am glad, very glad! I do not think I could have borne to fail and disappoint you, but I am not triumphant. Those people did not care for me; my voice pleased them, that was all!"

D'Arcy stroked her fair hair caressingly.

"You love your art, my child?"

"Yes, I love it," she answered, wearily.

"Only I am tired. I shall get used to it in time, but the noise and the bustle almost killed me, and the glare of the footlights bewildered me."

Next week the critics spoke. Notices of the new Amina appeared in all the newspapers, and for once the criticisms were alike. Every one with one voice praised the grace and talent, the beauty and charms of Mademoiselle D'Arcy. Mr. Gordon was enchanted. He came himself all the way to Colville-road to convey his congratulations.

"And now," he said, with the air of one who states a positive fact, "one thing is certain—you must move!"

Mr. and Mrs. D'Arcy looked thunderstruck. Their ward alone found words.

"Why?—we are very happy here!"

"Why?" asked Mr. Gordon, laughing. "My dear mademoiselle, you don't suppose you can remain in retirement! You will be inundated with invitations!"

"Well!"

"And you could not accept them if you lived here—an hour's drive from fashionable parts!"

"I like Camberwell," declared Beatrice. "I have no wish to go anywhere grander!"

"Mr. Gordon is right!" said the musician, quietly. "I ought to have thought of it myself. This is not a fit place for the leading singer of the day; but we love the old home too well to give it up! What do you say to our taking a little furnished house somewhere at the West-end, just for the time Beatrice is engaged at the opera?"

"The money?" suggested the girl, quickly. "I owe you so much already!"

But Mr. Gordon was not a mean man. He paid his *protégée* a liberal salary; and Michael told her the rent of a small furnished house would be a mere bagatelle, and so it was settled.

The next week they removed to Rose Bank, Regent's Park; and if poor Mrs. D'Arcy felt decidedly out of her element in her new surroundings she was too kind-hearted to complain.

It was just as the manager had said. Beatrice D'Arcy became the fashion. Very soon she had more invitations for the nights when she was free than she could possibly accept. Engagements to sing at private concerts flocked in; but these she never willingly accepted, only sometimes she found it impossible to refuse.

Herbert Cecil was her constant and devoted attendant; but others vied with him in their admiration of the beautiful singer. Before she had been a month on the stage more than one man had thrown his hand and fortune at her feet.

It was not only her talents they admired. She had a nameless grace, an unmistakable air of aristocracy, which impressed strangers at first sight. Men respected her as they did their own sisters. There was nothing fast or dashing about her; she seemed to them like a beautiful, pure white flower!

She recognised many of the people she had met during that short visit to Castle St. Clare—Blanche Delaval and her husband, looking very much bored with each other's society; Beatrice Fane and the Captain in the stalls, a keen enjoyment written on their faces.

These came not once but several times to hear the "new singer," but the auditor for whom Dora waited and longed still tarried!

At last, when she began to think he had left England, one night she saw him. Her heart beat quickly! He was in a box with several ladies. One of them, a tall brunette, sat at his right hand, and seemed to engross his attention.

Thus much Beatrice D'Arcy noticed as she stood in the background; then, as she advanced, and a burst of applause for one moment silenced her, she raised her blue eyes fearfully to the box and saw a strange, sudden recognition written on the Earl's face! His expression softened, an eager light brightened his eyes, but the *prima donna* bestowed him no other glance.

She threw herself heart and soul into her part; she sang with a sweetness, a passionate intensity, her admirers said, she had never shown before!

At the end of the second act a perfect shower of bouquets fell around her, and one of them from the hands of Lord St. Clare! Her conduct then was singular. The tenor, who played the part of her lover, collected the bouquets, and offered the largest and most delicate to her. The others were more than he could well carry. Mademoiselle D'Arcy carelessly knocked it aside, and, stooping with a rare grace, selected from among the mass of flowers in her companion's hand a fragrant bunch of white roses.

They both retired, and Alan saw his flowers alone discarded on the stage! What did it mean? He meant to know!

He was not a frequent opera-goer, but for days his sister had tormented him with praises of Mademoiselle D'Arcy. He had chanced to meet the Duke of Marton that day and been invited to dinner *en famille*; he found the whole party were intending to go to the Prince's Opera, so he had hardly any excuse for not accompanying them.

He knew that society had destined Lady Ellinger Law for his wife; that the young lady admired him; that she was cold and sensible, prudent and even-tempered, suited in every way to make a nobleman a charming wife, and to train his children—if Heaven sent him any—in the way they should go. Poor Alan's love affairs had ended so badly—his first choice had deserted him, his second was lost in a veil of mystery—that he was almost inclined to forewear the tender passion—he wanted to marry and settle down. After all, it was not a wife for himself that was needed so much as a mistress for his house—a mother for his future children. To both these *ides* the Lady Ellinger was admirably suited. Alan's mind was wavering when he accompanied her to the opera.

And there suddenly appeared before him the object of his search—the girl to find whom had for more than four months been his chief desire. He recognised her at once. True she wore the picturesque dress of an Italian peasant—true her beautiful hair floated loosely over her shoulders, and her arms were bare. Nothing could have been more different than this attire from the one in which he had seen her last; but yet Alan felt certain of her identity. She raised her blue eyes for a moment to his box, and after that all doubts were over.

It was she—the creature whose voice had fallen sweetly on his ear as he lay sick and prostrate! It was she, the girl he had prayed to lay her cool hand upon his burning head—more

beautiful than ever, a little older, a little graver too, for genius is a hard mistress; but there was no mistaking that face and voice.

Did she know him? Alan would have given much to answer the question. He believed she did; and yet she scorned his flowers. Her action was too marked to have been unpremeditated. What did it all mean?

The Ladies Law were due at a ball about midnight, and so they left the opera before it was quite over. Alan saw them to their carriage, and then returned breathlessly to the theatre. He had a slight acquaintance with the manager; and, meeting him on the grand staircase, he went straight to the point and begged for an introduction to Mademoiselle D'Arcy.

"I thought you were proof against all beauties, Lord St. Clare?"

"I think I recognize in Mademoiselle D'Arcy an old friend. I wish to be sure if it is so."

The manager smiled. "She is not apt to claim acquaintance with gentlemen; a very proud and distant young lady, indeed! That is her character."

"And you'll take me behind?"

"With pleasure, only I cannot guarantee your seeing mademoiselle. Sometimes she does not honour the green-room for nights together!"

Alan felt puzzled.

"Will you tell me one thing—is her real name D'Arcy?"

"Assuredly!" and the manager's voice spoke to his belief in his own words. "I have known her uncle for years, and his father before him, but always under the name of D'Arcy."

They had reached the green-room by this time.

Many stood about in careless chat, for the curtain had fallen, and the opera was over, but the face for which Alan sought was not there.

The manager left to make inquiry, and then returned to the young Earl.

"She has gone home!"

"Ah!" disappointedly.

"Shall I give you her address?"

Alan shook his head.

"I am quite sure in my own mind she is the young lady I remember; but I don't think I should be bold enough to go and call upon her and tell her so."

"Well, she plays again on Thursday and Saturday; but you are sure to meet her somewhere before long—she goes everywhere. She is the fashion just now; with her voice and her beauty she has taken the world by storm."

The young Earl went home, but not to sleep. He quite forgot all about Lady Ellinger. He had room in his heart but for one thought—Beatrice, and why she so deliberately spurned his gift?

It happened that the next night he was engaged to go to a large ball. Besides the attractions of dancing, the evening commenced with a concert, and some of the first artists of the day had been secured.

Lord St. Clare went to the party with the Ladies Law. He mostly did go into society under their auspices. It saved him trouble, and so long as Lady Ellinger had no real claims on him he did not mind appearing in public at her side.

The party arrived quite early, and the musical portion of the entertainment had hardly begun.

Lord St. Clare secured a programme, and discovered that Mademoiselle D'Arcy was to sing two solos.

For him the whole entertainment centred on those ballads.

She came. Her toilet was simple to a degree, and yet imperfect taste—a long flowing dress of the material known as nun's veiling—then in its infancy—frimmings of turquoise blue, and real forget-me-nots in her beautiful hair.

Alan was at Lady Ellinger's side. He forgot her claims on his allegiance.

"What a sweet face!" he cried, when the

first song was finished. "Lady Ellinger, did you ever hear such a divine voice?"

"She has been taught well," chirrily.

"Taught! no teaching could produce such a voice as that. Ha! they have encased her; and no wonder! She deserves it!"

"It is intensely hot," complained Lady Ellinger; "could we not go somewhere out of the crowd?"

He took her into the conservatory, but if she had hoped to bring about a long *à-la-carte* she was disappointed.

Alan hardly spoke.

At last the strains of the band sounded, and a gentleman appearing in search of Lady Ellinger, who had accepted him as partner for the first dance, Alan was left alone.

He did not linger in the conservatory. He went straight back to the drawing-room, and there, at his own sister's side, he saw Mademoiselle D'Arcy.

Some strange instinct had brought these two together.

Mrs. Fane, a large-hearted, generous woman, could not see that the fact of Miss D'Arcy singing for money took aught from her beauty or talents. She spoke to her as a friend and equal.

"Here is my brother!" as Alan advanced. And then she introduced them in due form; and seeing her hostess looking entreatingly towards her she went forward to assist in the hopeless task of providing the ugliest girls in the room with partners.

Left alone Alan Lord St. Clare felt struck suddenly dumb.

"I needed no introduction!" he said, at last. "I had not forgotten my gentle nurse."

The blue eyes looked at him with deep surprise.

"Are you labouring under some delusion, Lord St. Clare?"

"I could not be mistaken," he said, quickly. "You are the Beatrice I knew at Vale?"

She answered nothing.

"You can not deny it!"

Then she said coldly—

"It is hardly worth while contradicting people who make such absurd mistakes. I was in Italy last year for some months; since that I have been at home."

"And you are not Mrs. Johnson's niece?"

"I have very few relatives. None, I am sure, of that name."

Alan looked like a man walking in his sleep. "I cannot understand it," he said, feverishly.

"It is very simple," she said, with inflexible composure. "You have mistaken me for some one else. It is not very flattering to me, but I will forgive you."

She made him a little chilling courtesy, let fall the long train of her soft, white dress, and swept past him like some injured spirit of the night, leaving him in a state of mind easier to imagine than describe.

CHAPTER XVI.

FROM that night forward Lady Ellinger Law had but little of Lord St. Clare's time or attention. Alan hardly entered the Duke's house. His whole being seemed absorbed in one idea—a furious pursuit of Beatrice D'Arcy.

He frequented every place where he was likely to see her. He never missed an opera night when she was advertised to sing. He became her shadow, and society spoke openly of him as one of her victims.

In truth she had many. The little lonely wanderer who had been homeless so few months ago—who had been reckoned as plain and unattractive—was now a beautiful, brilliant woman.

She never flirted, she never sought to win men's hearts, she gained them almost unconsciously, to her own regret, for she had suffered too much from love herself to care to win that of others; since she was powerless to return it.

She was the fashion. Wherever she went she won golden opinions. Artists raved about the beauty of her eyes; poets dedicated their

verses to her; dressmakers gave her name to their latest fashions. And she went through it all with a simple dignity.

Utterly free from triumph or exultation she accepted the public homage as indifferently as she would have braved its scorn.

What did it matter to her that she was the darling of the London world?—that even the heart she had once coveted seemed touched by her beauty?

She had learned now, from one she could not doubt, that that heart was false and shallow. That if Lord St. Clare could have found the little village maid he had known at Vale he would have won her love for the amusement of an hour—and left her.

"Oh, my darling!" the girl used to moan sometimes to herself when she was safe in the shelter of her own room, and no ear could hear her lamentation; "Oh, my darling! why have you fallen to something so unworthy of yourself? I could better have born to see you Blanche Delaval's husband—to feel that intense love for her had prompted your cruelty to me—than to have to see you as you are! And I must meet you almost daily—must hear your voice speak compliments—and be calm. I am on the stage—a public character. I cannot resent flattery even from the Lady Ellinger's future husband. Oh! the weariness, the bitter misery of it all!"

But no one guessed the sorrow at her heart. In public she was the beautiful, majestic actress. She hid her woman's heart and its bitter disappointment. Dora Clifford's trials were concealed beneath the success of Mademoiselle D'Arcy.

And day by day she met him—the man she had once thought perfect. Day by day she listened to compliments from his false, faithless lips; and she felt, as she heard them, she would rather have given her own life than that he should have sunk so low.

One thing she avoided carefully—all attempts at *à tête-à-tête*. She could not help it that Alan was always in his box at the opera—that his eyes never left her face. She could not help it that when she sang at private parties he was ever at her side; but she managed, by some wondrous skill, that he never spoke a word to her unheard by others since that first meeting we have chronicled. Those who openly discussed the admirers of the lovely *prima donna* never forgot to remark that she avoided Lord St. Clare steadily—that, when forced into conversation with him, she treated him with scornful pride.

But his opportunity came at last—the time he had longed for and counted on. It was a garden-party at the manager's. Almost three months had passed since her *début* night. Summer had come, it was the time for outdoor amusements; and so one lovely warm afternoon Beatrice D'Arcy and her uncle found themselves among the guests at Mr. Gordon's villa at Richmond.

The June sunshine fell pleasantly on the lawn, a pleasant air preserved the revellers from too great a heat. No weather could have been more charming; and Beatrice, dressed simply in soft white muslin, with ribbons the colour of her eyes, looked more like a child out for a little holiday than the dignified actress the public best knew.

Mrs. Gordon, a pretty, simple-minded woman, had an unbounded admiration for the beautiful singer. She and Beatrice had both declined lawn-tennis, and were strolling up and down discussing indifferent trifles. A little, fair-haired child, the manager's youngest, clung to Mademoiselle D'Arcy's hand—all children loved her. They were at some distance from the game, walking in the pleasant shrubbery, when a servant came up and claimed his mistress's attention.

Now, Mrs. Gordon was a most domestic woman. She had been used to small means, and when large ones came she never fell into the habit of leaving her housekeeping to others. The present question evidently had something to do with the matter of refreshments. She turned to her guest quickly.

"Will you let Flossy take you back to watch the game, mademoiselle? I am afraid I must go indoors for a moment."

With the instinctive good-breeding which never forsook her, the girl accepted the apology, and Mrs. Gordon hurried off.

Miss D'Arcy and Flossy stood for a moment watching her quick departure. Then they, too, were about to retrace their steps when there appeared at their side the man of all others Beatrice most wished to avoid—Lord St. Clare.

He must have been watching his opportunity, and came to join her the moment he saw Mrs. Gordon return alone. He greeted her with outstretched hand, which she would not see. Instead, she made him a low bow, and would have passed on but that he placed himself deliberately in her path.

"Do you think I am made of wood or stone not to feel your insults?" he cried, fiercely. "Mademoiselle D'Arcy, from the moment my sister introduced you to me you have treated me with systematic scorn!"

She played nervously with her parasol. She looked at the child, whose hand still clasped hers, as though to remind him they were not alone.

He took the hint quickly. He had been to Richmond several times, and Flossy and he were sworn friends.

"Flossy!" he said, to the little maid, "I have no flower in my coat. Don't you think you could find me one?"

The child was delighted.

"But there are none here!" she said, regretfully. "I shall have to go a long, long way. Will you wait for me?"

"Yes."

"You promise?"

"Yes."

"I will promise you, Flossy," said Beatrice, in a tone of suppressed passion, for she was intensely angry at his speech; "and I keep my word, you know. It is only fine gentlemen who break theirs!"

The little thing sped away. The two, who were at such utter cross-purposes—who loved each other so dearly, and yet were drifting so far apart—were left alone. Beatrice had nerved herself for the interview. She felt as if it must come as well then as later.

She stood calm and dignified at his side. He little guessed the world of passion raging at her heart—as little as that she had once prepared a dress to wear at the ceremony which should make her his wife, or that their lips had ever met in a betrothal kiss.

He had cared little for the career then; had just touched her face carelessly with his lips as a matter of duty. What would he not have given for the privilege now?

"Well?"

"I am waiting for my answer. What is the reason of your conduct towards me?"

"And what if I have none?"

"That I do not believe!" he answered, sternly. "No woman would behave to any man as you have to me without some motive!"

"How have I behaved?"

"You best know. You have treated me as the dirt beneath your feet. How have I offended you? Because I mistook you for someone I knew—because I ventured to claim your acquaintance? Surely I did you no wrong?"

"No!" she admitted, reluctantly. "It was not that."

"What then? I will never believe you are so narrow-minded as to take umbrage at the idea that the world holds another face which has a faint reflection of your beauty!"

"You only do me justice."

"What, then, have I done?"

But she did not answer him; they were very near an explanation now—so near that a few words on either side would have rolled away the mist that divided them—but neither spoke those words; they stood still, motionless—his eyes fixed upon the ground, hers bent on him with an expression of passionate adoration.

"Is it that you have guessed my presumption?" he asked in a hoarse whisper. "Is it

that some instinct told you what you were to me, and did you adopt this means of telling me it was all in vain?"

"I guessed nothing!"

"Then I will speak, however much you may spurn me, however much you may despise me. I worship you; from the moment I saw your face upon the stage I loved you—in spite of coldness, of rebuffs such as I think man never knew before. I love you still, not less than then, but a thousand times more!"

She laughed bitterly.

"Fortunately, I never believe idle speeches, Lord St. Clare; fortunately for myself I know the worth of such protestations."

"Mademoiselle D'Arcy!"

She turned on him with cruel scorn. "I am quite aware that in my position I ought to feel flattered and grateful for the passing interest of a powerful nobleman; but I do neither. If a woman loves a man she deserves all he can give her; if she does not she deserves contempt for listening to him! But on your account I am spared all gratitude—all regret. Why everyone knows that Lord St. Clare changes his divinity with the seasons. I know a little of your private history, my lord. I have no desire to add to the number of your conquests!"

"Hear me!" cried Alan, hoarsely.

"Nay, hear me! Because a foolish ambitious woman jilted you, what right had you to destroy a young girl's peace? One did I say—I mean two! I have heard the whole story of your destined bride—I have heard the village romance which ended so suddenly. No, my lord! don't talk of love and devotion. Marry the Duke's daughter, who is waiting to accept you, and leave us others, who are not born in the purple—who are children of the people—to guard our poor hearts against you as we may!"

The burst of passionate reproach had almost exhausted her; she leant back against a chestnut tree for support. Long after this scene lived in his memory—the background of fresh green leaves framing her fair figure and lovely face—he thought of her so often, and never without a pang.

He did not attempt his defence. He stood as one spellbound till, in the distance, they saw the little child returning; then by a desperate effort he found his voice.

"You have judged me very cruelly. As Heaven stands above us I have told you the simple, unvarnished truth!"

"I do not care for a truth that has been told to so many others—tell it to the Lady Ellinger."

"If I do!" he said sternly. "If I wreck her life and mine it will be your doing. How can I marry another woman when I know that while I live a word, a smile from you would draw me to your side?"

"Respect me!" said the girl, coldly. "if you cannot respect yourself. I am not likely to seek to attract anyone—you least of all!"

The little girl had reached the corner of the shrubbery; she came running up to them a minute later, her hands full of scentless cream-tinted roses.

Alan shuddered as he took them from her. He had seen those flowers so often in Italy, and knew the superstition respecting them. These small scentless roses are never used by the Italians for decorations or presents—they are kept sacredly for one solemn purpose, that of adorning the bodies of the dead. For a moment he regarded the child's offering as a prophecy of early death either for himself or Miss D'Arcy, but in a moment his common sense chased away the fancy.

Flossy stood on tiptoes, and with pretty childish grace placed a rose in his button-hole, then she turned to Beatrice, and offered her the others. The girl took them; she could not have refused the child. Then she stooped and kissed the fair, innocent face. When she raised her eyes she saw that Lord St. Clare had disappeared.

It was hard to seem as usual all through that summer evening—it was harder to evade

Mrs. D'Arcy's affectionate inquiries as to her pale looks when she reached home. Strangely weary of life and its burden felt the beautiful wanderer, when at last she laid her head on her pillow.

Herbert Cecil came to dinner the next day; he often spent his Sundays at Rose Bank.

From the day he had told Beatrice of his discovery he never once alluded to it. He seemed strangely grave and sad; in fact, Herbert's conscience was smiting him bitterly for his deceit and fraud.

By nature a strictly honourable man, nothing but his intense, absorbing love for Beatrice could have made him play such a treacherous part, and now his crime had its own reward.

He saw the creature he idolized wearing away her heart under a secret sorrow. The friend he loved, saddened by a heavy disappointment—one word from him and both these two would have been restored to happiness. But Herbert was only human. He could not bear to speak that word, since it was the death-blow to his own hopes.

He proposed a walk in the park after dinner, and Beatrice assented—anything was better than staying at home and brooding over her own sad thoughts; so together the two, who played such an all-powerful part in each other's life, went to the great resort of fashionable London on a Sunday afternoon, and seated themselves to watch the constant passing and repassing stream of promenaders.

"Would you rather walk?" he asked her.

"No, I am so tired!"

So they sat still, and he talked to her of the brilliant crowd who passed before them, pointing out many a notable of the day to her, and giving her, by his own self-command, that strange feeling of ease and protection she always experienced in his presence.

Many an acquaintance stopped to speak to them; many who admired the beautiful *prima donna* envied Herbert his position. They need not have done so. No heart in all that throng was heavier than his. He never forgot his treachery. The recollection of it was eating like wormwood into his soul!

They had been there some time. Beatrice was talking of returning home, when a lady and gentleman advanced towards them, and took a seat so near that their conversation could be overheard. A cold, cruel pain filled the wanderer's soul. True, she had told Alan to tell his story to Lady Ellinger Law, but she had not thought she would be a witness of their courtship.

The Duke's daughter was dressed superbly in silk and velvet. The lace on her parasol alone must have cost pounds. She looked what she was—coldly, superbly perfect!—a handsome ornament with which to adorn one's house!

Our heroine, on the contrary, wore a simple French sateen of a pale cream ground, with bunches of delicate flowers printed on it; a shady hat, trimmed with a wreath of forget-me-nots. Her whole toilet cost less than Lady Ellinger's parasol. The two were a striking contrast. It was nature and art.

The air wafted to them the echo of my lady's hard metallic voice as she upbraided the Earl for his scanty visits and general defection.

"Do you know what they say of you?" she asked him, trying to look acute, and failing signally in the effort.

"No."

"That you are going to be married!"

"Well," he rejoined, with a half-weary air, "they might say things less true!"

"Then it is correct?"

"I am the last of my line, and the Dones are an old race. Bee is the most devoted of sisters, but I can't quarter myself on her for ever. Sooner or later I must go to my own home, and I shall never go there by myself. I hate solitude!"

"One part of the report is true, then? Doubtless the second is! People say that you are going to forget every tradition of your

race, and stoop to a marriage with a public singer!"

"They are very kind!"

"They say that girl at the Prince's Opera, with her tragedy airs and graces, is to be Countess of St. Clare!"

"Did you believe them?" asked Alan, coolly.

"I do not know!" She felt herself on delicate ground, and could hardly tell how to answer him. "Men as high-bred as you have been caught before by a pretty face, and those women on the stage have so many tricks and wiles!"

The listener could bear it no longer. She turned to Mr. Cecil with a little gasping cry.

"Take me away! Oh, Bertie, take me away! I cannot bear it!"

She did not know she had used his name—that it had been wrung from her in her agony; she did not know that his face was as white as her own, and full of a deep-set anger! She was conscious of nothing but a desire to escape!

Herbert rose as she spoke, but one glance at her told him the trial had been too much for her. Another moment and he was holding his darling's senseless form in his arms, while a fashionable crowd gathered round to wonder what had caused the beautiful opera-singer to faint away!

(To be continued.)

SUNLIGHT.—Kisses are the sunlight of life. There are many aching hearts from which the load of sorrow might be lifted by the kiss of forgiveness; there are many tired feet which could be made to gain strength enough to struggle on to success and honour by the kiss of approbation and encouragement. Then let us give them as they are needed; not indiscriminately, to be sure, but justly and generously, and let us not withhold them until the lips that longed for them are mute; for one of the saddest sounds e'er heard on earth is "the fall of kisses on unanswering clay."

WHAT IS MONEY?—The value of a commodity limits its quantity. Anything which can be obtained in a limited quantity, with a certain ascertainable amount of labour, and which is divisible, will serve the purpose of money. Furs have been employed in some countries as money, cattle in others—as in the "Iliad," in the estimation of the respective value of the shields of Diomedes and Glaucus, the one worth nine oxen, the other a hundred oxen—bricks of tea in Tartary, cowries in Africa, rock salt in Abyssinia. Other African tribes calculated in *racotes*, a money of the mind, which has no substance corresponding to it, but the value contained in which has been sufficiently ingrained in their minds to answer the purpose of a measure of value. Bullion is chosen because it complies with these two conditions, difficulty of acquisition and divisibility, better than any known substance. Is it not strange that we should turn this servant into our master and elevate that which is a mere medium for avoiding the inconveniences of barter into an indispensable necessary of life, hardly secondary to food and clothing? If by some convulsion of nature the precious metals, gold and silver, were utterly destroyed, the world would be impoverished by the loss of a commodity on the discovery and manufacture of which much labour and time have been expended, but the only result would be that we should have recourse to some other contrivance. The main business of life would go on as before, and the only difference would probably be that we should be obliged to have recourse to a paper currency, based on whatever might be found, after careful consideration, to be the most convenient or least inconvenient standard value. The question would be, as it is now, a question of remedying the inconvenience of barter by providing some means of fixing prices. That would be all.

SAYINGS OF DOUGLAS JERROLD.

Jerrold and Lamon Blanchard were strolling together about London, passionately discussing a plan for joining Lord Byron in Greece. Jerrold, telling the story many years after, said, "But a shower of rain came on, and washed all the Greece out of us."

"Call that a kind man?" said an actor, speaking of an absent acquaintance; "a man who is always from his family, and never sends them a farthing! Call that kindness?" "Yes, unremitting kindness," Jerrold replied.

At a social club to which Jerrold belonged, the subject turned one evening upon music. The discussion was animated, and a certain song was cited as an exquisite composition. "That song," exclaimed an enthusiastic member, "always carries me away when I hear it." Jerrold (looking eagerly round the table): "Can anybody whistle it?"

He was so benevolent, so merciful a man that, in his mistaken compassion, he would have held an umbrella over a duck in a shower of rain.

"God has written 'honest man' on his face," said a friend to Jerrold, speaking of a person in whom Jerrold's faith was not altogether blind. "Humph!" Jerrold replied; "then the pen must have been a very bad one."

To an impertinent fellow, whom Jerrold avoided and who attempted to intrude himself by saying a bright thing, Jerrold said, sharply turning upon the intruder, "You're like lead, sir—bright only when you're out."

It has been said that the most valuable man is he who while superior in one thing is fairly good in several; and the same truth holds good in mental and moral life, as well as business or profession. The finest mind is that which, though strongest in a favourite line of thought, is able to run with ease in many others; and the best moral character is that which, while excelling in certain good qualities which are spontaneous, has yet acquired many others in which it was deficient.

It is the absence of sympathy, far more than any excess of it, that interferes with truth in the estimates we make. Only through sympathy can we even approximately know any one. This alone enables us to realize, though in faint degree, the condition of mind, the circumstances, temptations, tendencies, motives—all, in fact, that go to make up the character of actions. Judgments formed without any of this knowledge must be untrustworthy.

AN EARTHLY PARADISE.—A story, about which there is a fascination it is impossible to resist when you hear men tell it, is that of the "Home of Gold." Somewhere in south-western New Mexico, in the Sierra Madre, it is said there is a wonderful valley. Small, enclosed in high, rocky walls, and accessible only by a secret passage, which is known to but a few, is this extraordinary place. It is about ten acres in extent, has running through it a stream which waters it thoroughly, and makes it a perfect paradise, with its exquisite flowers and beautiful trees. In it are thousands of birds of the most beautiful plumage. Running across it is a ledge of pure gold about thirty feet wide, which glistens in the sunlight like a great golden belt. The stream crosses this ledge, and as it runs, murmurs around blocks of yellow metal as others do around pebbles. The ledge of gold is supposed to be solid gold, and to run down into the centre of the earth. The legend is of Indian origin, and around it clusters a number of Indian stories, in which the name of the ill-fated Montezuma occurs frequently. The descendants of the Aztecs believe firmly that the day will come when Montezuma will return and free them from the descendants of the Conquistadores. They believe that the money necessary for this work will be taken from the Madre d'Oro.

PUT TO THE PROOF.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The frosty sunlight shone in upon Lord Lexton's town house. Lady Lexton was waiting breakfast; she was looking ill and haggard; the Christmas time had passed badly with her. She never could bear worry, and now she felt the ill-effects of parting with her son under such strange and unexpected circumstances.

She grieved for Vashti, who was suffering in silence, both bodily and mentally.

They had been in London some days now, and Carl Gonther had been their constant visitor. Each time they met Vashti felt more keenly the sin of her broken betrothal. Carl was so different to Mark; it humbled her proud spirit to be obliged to submit to his presence, and accept his attention.

Carl Gonther felt far from satisfied with his engagement; it brought him but mixed sweets, yet it was useful to him, for he had managed to get a notice of the match put into most of the society papers, and through it had got him into a fashionable club, the members of which accepted him not as the successful actor, but the future son-in-law of the influential Lord Lexton.

When Vashti read these reports her lips curled with unutterable scorn, and so Carl had to be content with the mere fact of his engagement, for Vashti would permit no lover-like familiarity. She seemed turned to stone—a woman white and wan and beautiful, but utterly without life.

Carl looked at her often in mute amazement, and wondered how he could endure to pass his life beside such an icicle, and inwardly resolved to take a high hand directly she was his wife.

Sometimes he wondered if she had ever really intended to marry him! Then his face would darken, and he would think savagely, "she dare not try to fool me—she is too much in my power! If she dared to throw me over my revenge should be swift and sure. I would make her heart bleed through those she loves."

He was so unaccustomed to coldness from women that Vashti's icy reserve increased his interest in her. He was proud of her, as men are of fine horses, valuable works of art, or rich and titled friends; but her blameless life, her pure womanhood, her exalted notions of honour and power of self-sacrifice were to him as hidden streams for which he had no thirst. Her beauty was a source of ever-increasing delight to him, because it was of an unusual kind, and likely to reflect credit upon his taste.

He saw her in the future a leader of society, a beauty beyond dispute, a woman with worldly power, well wielded by her clever hands, a wife to increase a man's importance, a woman a power in herself which added to his own, would open out new paths for his own ambition; and once his wife he felt no fear of finding it hard to control her.

The morning in question Carl had sent Vashti a beautiful bunch of hot-house flowers and a ticket for a box at his theatre, where he deposited his manly graces as "Orlando."

Lady Lexton placed both beside her daughter's plate and sighed. Just then Vashti entered, looking as though she had passed a sleepless night. Great circles seemed to enlarge her beautiful sad eyes, and her cheeks were white as early snowdrops. She took her seat with a little smile of greeting, then took up the sweet-scented blossoms, and said to an attendant, "Please put them in water," then tearing open the letter tossed the contents to her mother, and drank a cup of tea feverishly.

Lady Lexton read the note, which was quite poetically worded, and then said, "Shall we go to-night, dear?"

"Just as you like, *cherie*; I have no interest in the matter."

Lady Lexton sighed and said, "I see Mr. Gonther intends to drive with us this morning. I wish he had not arranged to do so, as I am going to call on my old friend Miss Gilbert. A long time ago you promised to stay with her for a few weeks; and as she is your god-mother, and is an old maid and rich, it may be to your interest to humour her. And much as it grieves me to part with you, darling, I think it well you should take refuge with her till the storm blows over. I am afraid Lord Lexton will be very angry with us both—he was so fond of you, and so pleased with the idea of your marrying Mark."

Vashti was silent. They had discussed this matter before, and arrived at a decision in favour of the visit.

They were alone now—the servant had gone to obey Vashti's orders about the flowers.

"Mother, have you written to Mark?"

"No, darling; and I dread the task of inflicting such pain upon him. Besides, he was so impetuous; he will fly back to you, and make a scene, which I am sure you are in no fit state to endure. I know it must be done, dear, and mean to do it. Don't fret about it, pet! Try to cheer up—your sad face cuts me to the heart. Something may occur to upset this hateful marriage. Who knows? Carl may relent, and release you from your promise!"

"Mother, mother! why raise false hopes, that you know will never be fulfilled. Carl Gonther is incapable of relenting; self-sacrifice is a nobility beyond his power of conception. No, I must bear all to the bitter end. He worries me already to fix the time of marriage, as if he can expect me to put a period to my own freedom—to sign my own death warrant! Oh! mother, mother! I hate him, and I love my Mark with a deathless, glorious love that seems to consume me. What will he think of me when he hears of this hated engagement? And after such love as his, how can that of another man—and such another—be anything but loathsome?"

"Hush! my dearest! remember what you have done for others. Think of the happiness of your brother; think of the good old name saved from dishonour by your nobility; think, still better, of the all-seeing power that has accepted this sacrifice from you, and placed it to the account of one who loved others dearer than self, and gave happiness to others while she accepted torment! Try to remember that existence here is but a prelude to the glorious harmony of that other fuller, nobler life with God: I know my lips are unworthy to speak of the peace to be obtained by looking beyond this life. Yet how can I see you so troubled, and not try to comfort you?"

"Ah, my mother! you are good and kind! Be patient with me; I cannot help pining out in my agony. 'Tis so cruelly hard to have held the cup of happiness to your very lips—to have seen, as in a vision, the glory of perfect love—that only earthly Heaven—and then of your own will to have turned aside; and, instead of drinking the living waters, have stooped to some murky, loathsome stream, and been compelled to drink of that for which you have no thirst. Drink of that which will breed fever in your blood, madness in your brain. Oh, mother! 'tis so degrading to marry without love; it must kill all one's purity of thought—all one's integrity of heart. But when one marries one man—loving another as I love, 'tis positive sin that must bring its own punishment. But, forgive me! I cannot lessen the burden by trying to make you take up my misery. I am selfish to weary you with my useless complaints. Yet I feel as if I must cry out or die. There is such a dreadful burden on my heart!"

Lady Lexton put her cool hand on her daughter's hot forehead, and said, anxiously,—

"Vashti, if you go on like this, you will be ill!"

"Be ill, mother, and perhaps die! We read that there is no marrying or giving in marriage in Heaven, and there can be no Carl Gonther there. Perhaps if I were dead Mark might

forgive me, and love my memory, and when he entered into his rest we could meet without the shadow of a sin between us. Mother, you have given me a blessed hope, yet I fear I am too young and strong to die of grief or shame—

"My heart must break,
But brokenly live on."

"Vashti, I entreat you to take a common-sense view of this wretched affair. Women marry without love daily, and live worthy, contented lives. Ah! and do good and accept their fate in the end contentedly; why should not you? You may have children—pure, bright souls to guard as treasures lent from Heaven to comfort you. You may find new pursuits, new hopes, new happiness if you will only try to forget Mark!"

"Forget Mark! Ah! when I forget to breathe, mother! I will never speak of him again, but I shall love him always; he lives in my life, is the centre of my heart. I only half-lived till I loved him. There are women and women. I am of the unfortunate class who love strongly, and love for ever. Read your letters, dear; I am going to my room to be dressed for this enviable drive. I am afraid Peggy finds me a troublesome mistress, and wishes herself vegetating at the 'Warren!'"

Lady Lexton, to whom dress was a duty, said, hastily,—

"Put on your ruby velvet, trimmed with bear, pet; and the hat to match. That will make you look nice, and I intend to call upon Miss Gilbert."

Vashti closed the door sharply. There were points upon which she and her mother clashed. One of these was dress. It vexed her to be perpetually studying how to make the best of herself, and to-day it seemed simply intolerable, but she adopted her mother's suggestion nevertheless, and Peggy said she looked lovely. So thought Carl as she came into the sunlit drawing-room, her beautiful Clytie head held proudly erect.

They were alone, so Carl greeted her with effusion, holding both her hands. He tried to snatch a kiss from her scornful lips. A look of hers caused him to draw back, tamely quoting a line from *Manteaux Noirs*—"I hope I am not going too far."

She did not answer him, but went to the window and looked out.

"Is it not a delightful day, darling?" asked Carl.

"Oh! delightful," answered she, without turning her head.

"Will you come to the theatre to-night?"

"Which is the theatre? You speak as if there is but one!"

"I mean, of course, where I act."

"You mean, of course, where you act, naturally. That is the theatre to you."

"And should be the theatre on that account to my promised wife!"

"What should be is not, or I should not be your promised wife. Ask Lady Lexton her plans for this evening—they include mine!"

"What a dutiful daughter you are! I hope you may prove as dutiful a wife."

"Sir, my duty to my mother is dictated from Heaven; my duty to my husband is likely to be directed by the devil!"

"Good, good! A droll speech from so proper a lady. Here comes Lady Lexton! Dear madam, you are looking as bright as the morning. Really that regal shade of purple must have been invented by a person who had a foreknowledge of the lady it would most suitably adorn. Purple velvet and such sables are positively a poem. Allow me to lead you to the carriage."

Vashti followed—her lips curled scornfully. The more she saw of Carl the more she revolted against her bondage. They drove through the park, which was thronged with people. Everyone knew the Lexton carriage and Carl Gonther, and many who did not know of his engagement to Vashti wondered to see him there.

He felt gratified by his position, and his

handsome, audacious face glowed with pride and pleasure.

When they had left the park they soon arrived at their destination, a pretty place on the outskirts of the park. They were received cordially by a mild, little old maid, who reminded Vashti of a gentle, little grey dove.

She was delighted to see her godchild and her old friend Beryl, but was rather cool to Carl, for she hated plays and players, and did not hesitate to avow her dislike, so that Carl was glad when the visit was over, though he saw the expediency of Vashti's visiting so wealthy a connection. Vashti read his sordid thoughts, and despised him more than ever.

That night Lady Lexton and her lovely daughter, arrayed as befitting their beauty and position, sat in a box, looking interested in one of the most charming plays of the immortal bard. In spite of herself Vashti was pleased by Carl's acting; and had he not been so distasteful to her she would have admired his personal charms, for Carl as Orlando was a triumph—an undisputed and complete success.

Lady Lexton seeing his creative genius, said admiringly,—

"What a talented, handsome rogue it is! Well, if one must marry an actor, one is fortunate in finding a man to be proud of in his profession!"

Vashti's brows contracted and she bit her lips savagely. She hated her mother to admire even in so distant a way, the man who had been their Nemesis. After the entertainment was ended, Carl came and handed them into their carriage, saying,—

"He would call upon them in the morning."

"Come and dine instead," said Lady Lexton. "We shall be alone, and it will be Vashti's last evening at home for some time. She has promised to spend a month with Miss Gilbert."

"A month! My dear madam, do you expect me to wait a century for my wife? In six weeks my engagement as Orlando ends, and I intend to take a holiday to spend with my bride."

He had whispered this in a quick undertone, but Vashti heard and was heart-sick; she had made him give her one reprieve—could she not exact another?

Carl kissed her hand when she gave it him to shake, and when she reached home Peggy wondered why her young mistress threw a brand-new ten-buttoned black glove into the fire, and then poked it down into the heart of the flame so viciously, and mentally decided that her young lady was getting ill-tempered.

The following afternoon Carl came to see Vashti. Lady Lexton was out, and so Vashti met him alone. A fire sparkled in the dusk of the unlighted room, and Vashti sat beside it, guarding her face with a screen of scarlet feathers.

She wore a heavy sombre dress of velvet, relieved only by ruffs of yellow lace. Carl, who had been making business calls, and was cold and tired, threw himself down on a couch beside her, and said,—

"You do not seem glad to see me, *ma belle*! You might 'assume a virtue if you have it not,' and give a fellow a welcome."

"I do not care to lower myself by deceit. Shall I ring for tea or coffee?"

"Yes. I should like a cup of black coffee and a glass of cognac."

Vashti rang the bell, gave the necessary orders, and bade the footman light the lamps. In a second the handsome room was aglow with light, that shed a soft roseate hue from tinted glasses. Carl took his coffee with an air of content. He was in evening dress, for he knew Lady Lexton would order dinner early, that he might not be late at the theatre.

When he had drunk his coffee he rose and stood looking down at Vashti's veiled eyes; he admired the full white lids, and long sombre lashes that were tipped with gold. These eyelids quivered a little when he spoke, though no muscle of the calm pale face moved, as he said,—

"Vashti, I came to-night to make you promise to marry me in six weeks!"

"Impossible, I cannot do it! You promised to give me time. I will not marry you at all if you press me to be your wife soon."

"You would say that if I said six months instead of six weeks."

"No I should not; say six months and see!"

Vashti had risen in her eagerness and faced him; her fine, fair face flushed, her lips apart in breathless expectancy. Carl admired her immensely; his admiration found vent in words that angered her.

"That is not answering me," she said, sharply.

"Kiss me, and I will agree to anything. I am positively famished for the taste of your lips!"

Vashti drew back haughtily, saying, "I will never kiss you for my own free will."

"A nice look-out for me that, I must say! I wonder you speak so foolishly to me who is to be your husband. I shall say six weeks; evidently you want managing. If I give way to your caprices they will never give way to me. Six weeks it must be."

"No, no! it must not! I will not consent; you drive me to desperation. I shall kill myself if you torment me so."

"Nonsense, Vashti, don't excite yourself so; you will be ill. Promise to try to be more kind to me, and I will let you have your own way. But six months from to-day you must and shall marry me. I can wait for my wife no longer. Do you think I am a stone, that you tax my patience in this way? Am I never to kiss your lips, hold you in my arms, or wrench one kind word from your unwilling tongue? We shall see, my beautiful; we shall see what a change a month of marriage will make in you. You shall be as tame as a pet dog, and as grateful for a caress. Now I can only look and long for the sweetness of your lips."

"They have no sweetness as you will find, for you are fighting for dead sea fruit."

Carl put his strong hands upon her shoulders and said, with a mocking laugh, "What would you do if I rifled those scornful lips of the caress they will not give?"

"I should say you were a coward."

"Ah! I understand. You think to vanquish me by your pride; you are a foolish girl to prefer war to peace. But let it be as you please; there are women that are more pleasing to me. Here is your mother; she will think we are always quarrelling."

Lady Lexton shook hands, and told him dinner was ordered at seven, and then left to dress. Vashti was about to follow, when Carl stayed her by saying,—

"Vashti, have you informed Mark Frost of our engagement?"

"No, I have not; there is time enough for that."

"I differ from you there, Miss Paget, and insist that the matter be made public at once. You agreed to my price when I promised alliance, and allowed your brother to escape the punishment he so richly deserved. I have kept my part of the contract—you shirk yours. Now, understand that I must be obeyed. You are in my power, and if you do not treat me more kindly I shall make you feel my power in a manner that may not be pleasant to you. I hear you intend to pay your godmother a visit; you must manage so that I can see you as often as I please. I am not to be trifled with by any woman. To anger me is to make misery and mischief for yourself. Put your hand in mine, and say, 'Carl, I promise to become your wife six months hence, and until then will treat you with the consideration due to my affianced.'"

Vashti put her hand in his, and, looking up at him said,—

"You will never make an actress of me, master of the art as you are! But we will not quarrel, 'tis too tiring; and there is nothing worth trouble in the world to me now. Let me go, I have barely time to dress!"

"But you have not repeated my words,"

"Do you want to make an echo of me?"

In a second she had gone, and Carl confessed that there is nothing so difficult to manage under heaven as a woman.

"Where is the man who has the power and skill To stem the torrent of a woman's will; For if she will, she will, you may depend on't And if she won't, she won't, and there's an end on't!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THAT evening, after Carl had left, a footman gave a foreign newspaper to Vashti, saying he found it in the hall, and fancied it had fallen from Mr. Gonther's great-coat.

Vashti took it indifferently, and opened it to see what it was. In the middle of the paper she saw an article underlined, and headed "Carl Gonther." She could not read German, and thinking it only some critique upon Carl's acting did not interest herself in it; but Major Paget, who had dropped in to take them to a concert, took it from her, saying, "Let's look at it; I can read German; let us have an opinion of native talent!"

He threw himself down on a chair, and prepared to read it carefully. After a time he exclaimed, "By Jove! how strange! I knew Carl Gonther was a clever fellow, but never imagined him a poet, much less the author of a work on surgical subjects that is accepted as an authority in a land of such advanced surgical skill as Germany! Here is one thing that amazes me—it refers to a serious illness of the author under discussion. Is it possible Carl pretends to be ill while he is rearing a triumph here in England as an actor? Fancy his being of a religious turn, and dowering a college for lads to be brought up as ministers of the gospel! Well, this is tricky—very. I should say it could not be the same man, were it not for this portrait, in which, by-the-by, the artist has idealized and refined him absurdly. Look at the dreamy look of his eyes, which are naturally more fierce than persuasive; and his mouth, too, is less hard, and they have made him less dark. To me this looks like the picture of what the man ought to have been, not what he is!"

Vashti had knelt down, and looked over the Major's shoulder, and said with a sigh, "Ah! if Carl was really like that he could not have traded on our fears. That face has nobility of mind, gentleness of heart, loftiness of soul in it, whereas Carl has only cunning, talent, and audacity. Give me the paper, I will keep it; the likeness puzzles me—'tis like yet unlike! The name is the same, but I cannot credit Carl—the Carl we know—with the goodness this mentions. I will tax him with hiding the best part of his life from us, which is strange, for his vanity makes him show his fairest side first."

Vashti had no opportunity of taxing Carl with concealing his talents, for her godmother came the next day, and took her away to her quiet pretty home.

She was so very good and gentle, and sympathetic, that Vashti's heart was won. A week passed more happily than Vashti had thought possible; but Vashti drooped more and more each day, till her kind friend grew alarmed, and insisted upon her seeing her doctor, a kind old man, who advised complete rest and quiet, a generous diet, and such amusement only as neither tax strength or brain. This suited Miss Gilbert, who loved to pet and nurse young people, and Vashti loved her; she made illness a luxury. Like all old maids, Miss Gilbert took a great interest in all love affairs, and she did not like the notion of her godchild marrying an actor; and a rumour had reached her of the rupture between Vashti and Mark, of whom she heard nothing but good. So she made up her mind that there was some misunderstanding between the lovers that a meeting might set right; so left word when she went out, as she often did without Vashti, that if Mark Frost called he was to be admitted at once to Vashti's presence.

"Let them make it up and get rid of the play-actor!" thought the tender-hearted old lady, not dreaming how much was involved in the unsuitable engagement that was sapping the life of the heart-broken girl she had learnt to love by instinct, as she had learned to pray, before she found both did her good.

Lady Lexton wrote a very loving, motherly letter to Mark; her heart ached for him. She knew he would suffer acutely, for he was strong in all things, and could be intensely wretched or intensely miserable; but even she could not gauge the depth of suffering that letter made a strong man endure.

The letter found Mark in a quaint old Tudor mansion, in a lovely-wooded country, where he had often gone to make holiday in his lonely childhood. It was a wild-winter's day, wind and sleet beat upon the window-pane, and in a stately chamber a lady, old and worn with suffering, awaited a long-expected guest. Death had clasped hands with heretofore, and drawn her over the narrow bridge of health that divides death from life. She, the weary and long-suffering, was at last—gone to that shadow-land where the Great Master teacheth eternal truth.

Mark, weary with watching, stood gaunt and hollow-eyed by the bedside, heart-sick at the sight of the last dread struggle; for death had entered, threatened by smothering elements, and had taken the final soul away in the storm. While Mark brooded over this death-scene, and longed for the sympathy of his darling to soothe his racked nerves; while he yearned for her with a great longing, Lord Lexton gave him her mother's letter.

He read it through in stern silence. The blow was so sudden, so unexpected, it seemed to stun him. Twice in incredulous haste did he scan the wretched letter; then said hoarsely, "Merciful Heaven, was ever a man so misused?"

"What is the matter, lad?" asked Lord Lexton.

"Matter! Read and see for yourself, and tell me, after this, if there is truth to be found in all the world?"

Lord Lexton uttered an exclamation of amazement as he read his wife's letter; then an ominous flash sparkled in his eyes, and his face flushed hotly.

"My dear boy, the girl must be the very incarnation of deceit; she is not worthy one regret from an honest heart. She has treated you with a refinement of cruelty I have never seen equalled. I am amazed! I could have sworn she was true as steel, but when put to the proof she is as full of devilish deceit as any other daughter of Eve. Why, we have left her little more than a week, and then, I dare swear, she showed you every sign of love one looks for in a woman so soon to be one's wife! For my soul I am angry—desperately angry! Were she my own daughter I would discard her. Now she and I are strangers. I love her mother dearly, perhaps too dearly, but even she shall never soften my heart towards her erring girl. Why, she is a living lie! a thing to despise and loathe! Take heart, my boy; you were meant for a better fate than to break your heart over such a thing as she."

Lord Lexton had paced the room and spoken in an angry voice; now he suddenly remembered where he was, and checked his hasty speech. The still form lying beneath the sheet seemed to rebuke him—something seemed to whisper—

"Hush! breathe not a breath of earthly passion before that passive form! She has passed beyond all turmoil, disturb not the repose of the dead."

Lord Lexton laid his hand on Mark's, and gently drew him out of the death-chamber, saying—

"I forgot where I was! Come to my room, lad; this is no place for discussing such a sinful subject as a woman's frailty, for as I live I believe that fellow had a hold upon Vashti, through some past indiscretion she was in his

power. There was a secret between them; and what secret could there be between a girl and a fellow like Gonthar, that was not shameful?"

They were in a cheerful sitting-room now, shut in from prying ears and eyes. His uncle's speech roused Mark out of his dazed despair; a faint glimmer of light broke in upon the mystery, and he said quietly—

"Hush! uncle; you misjudge her! Whatever her faults I cannot believe that her virtue was as unblemished as a holy vestal's. No, no! Gonthar's hold was of that sort; I think it concerned others. I will sift this matter thoroughly. I will get at the centre of his power. He shall not use the man to be rebuked of my best friends, and allow the thief to go unpunished. It shall be war to the death. I will wrench his wife from his arms; and if he has a spark of love for her, he shall suffer as I suffer, and know himself bereft of all that makes life worth living."

Mark turned to leave the room—a look of fixed resolve upon his face. Lord Lexton stopped him, and said earnestly—

"Mark, don't be rash! Remember, Vashti is this man's promised wife. What can you do but risk a scandal about the girl that, after all, she may not deserve? Be sensible; stay here, as we had arranged, till after the funeral—she will console you. You will find yourself, master here; your aunt's death has put a power in your hands—has made you an independent man. You are no longer dependent upon the work of your hands to live. You can have leisure, and luxury without stint!"

"Hush! what pleasure can fortune bring me now? 'Tis like recalling the exile when all his friends are dead, and he had lost the power of looking upon his native land. Work will be my only solace—without work I should go mad! Don't interfere with me, sir! I know you mean kindly, but just now I can only rush blindly on. I dare say I shall run my head against something that hurts, while urging on my mad career, but I shall not whine over it. I have felt the worst pain a man can be called upon to endure. There, don't look so shocked; my raving hurts nothing but my own dignity. I am not worthy your concern for me. I must go to London at once, and see Vashti—she has been part of my very soul—the softer, purer part of myself. Twenty men should not prevent my hearing her own version of this affair from her own lips. I promise you I will do nothing that shall put the purest to the blush; but I will know the meaning of this strange conduct from her own lips. I will return to the funeral—I owe my aunt much, and, indeed, I shall be grateful when I am my own man again. Now I seem like some mad thing, shrinking from unseen foes. I shall go to town at once. Wait here till I return; my business will not take long; I promise you. Good-bye!"

Lord Lexton sat down, like one stupefied. As well try to curb a hurricane as to control this half-maddened man. About ten minutes afterwards he heard the carriage, and Mark speaking in the hall. Then the house was still again, and Lord Lexton knew Mark had passed beyond his control.

Then he sat down, and wrote a long letter to Beryl—a letter full of angry reproach towards Vashti, which wound up by saying he would never receive her under his roof while she was betrothed to Carl.

When Mark arrived in London he hailed a hansom, and drove straight to Lord Lexton's town house—a splendid place, kept up on an almost regal scale. Lady Lexton was alone, and received him with a pained protest. He gave vent to no reproach before her, but insisted, in a quiet, self-controlled way, that she should tell him where to find her daughter.

Beryl shrank away from his stern, condemning eyes, and faltered out that she had been forbidden to reveal Vashti's whereabouts.

Mark laughed scornfully, and said—

"My dear lady, why distress yourself so? I am no melodramatic villain. I do not intend to kill Gonthar, but I do intend to know the

whole truth of this miserable matter—and know from Vashti's own lips. If you refuse to give me her address I shall simply go to the theatre, where Gonthar airs his manly graces, and dog his footsteps home, and make him tell me. Which do you think the wisest? To compel me to take this course, or to give me a chance of catching your daughter alone, and so avoid public dispute with this manikin whom the ladies love—this tinsel prince—this male professional beauty, whom I could crush as I would a loathsome reptile that stung me!"

Beryl, worn out and worried, burst into tears. She thought, after all, it might be better to submit to this masterful fellow; but she dreaded the effect of an interview with him upon Vashti, whom she knew to be almost dying for a sight of his beloved, ugly face.

"Here is the address, Mark; but I entreat you to be gentle to my poor girl, and for Heaven's sake avoid meeting her lover. Remember he can make her suffer for any fault he finds in her friends. It will upset her awfully to see you, and nothing can avail now."

Mark smiled as he took the address her ladyship wrote with a trembling hand.

He was beginning to calm down, and his keen intellect resumed its wonted vigilance.

The subtle detective genius, never long dormant in a man of his profession, was aroused.

He had put out his hand, and closed it upon the slender thread of a secret that had entangled so many lives.

As he took the paper from Beryl he met her eyes, and held her as under a spell while he said softly—

"A terrible pressure must have been put upon my promised wife to compel her to sacrifice herself and me in this manner; she loved me loyally, and was to have been my wife so soon. Then, without word or sign, she throws me over for a man I know she both feared and disliked. Now I fancy I have my full complement of brain, and I mean to use it in this matter. I shall not rest night or day till I know the nature of that man's power over my poor darling. I will have my pound of flesh. Carl Gonthar has left me out of count in this game of petty mystery. Good-bye, I will return and let you know how this meeting with your daughter has sped."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

VASHTI sat alone in her pleasant sitting-room the day that Mark came to London to see her. The short, dark winter day was ended.

Carl had gone to the theatre; he had made a grand hit in a new play, and was excited by the applause of the public; his vanity was satisfied by the admiration of the mob.

He was angry with Vashti because she would not go to witness his triumph; but Vashti was not to be moved by any mood of his and he knew it, and already the knowledge had power to sting him terribly.

He found Vashti a more formidable opponent than he had ever imagined to meet in a mere woman.

Vashti was alone when Mark knocked at the door and entered.

The room was brilliantly lighted, and Vashti stood on the white fur rug before the fire, dressed in a quilted dressing-gown of pale blue satin, the colour of forget-me-nots.

Her bronzed hair hung in a thick, untidy plait below her waist; she was very pale, with dark circles under her haggard young eyes, and her full ripe lips had troubled lines about them.

So Mark saw her, and the change so short a time had wrought in her made him forget all else but that she was suffering, and that he loved her.

Without a word he closed the door behind him, and strode to where she stood, transfixed with a look of dread in her great grey eyes.



["TELL ME," HE CRIED, "YOU DO NOT LOVE HIM, YOU DARE NOT!"]

A low cry broke from her as he stretched out his arms to her, and as a bird flies home to its nest she fell forward upon his breast, sobbing out,—

"Forgive me, Mark, forgive me! I could not help what I did. And oh! I am so unhappy."

For a second Mark held her against his heart in silence—her sobs shook his very soul with sympathy.

"My darling, my treasure, what madness possessed you to put yourself in that man's power? Tell me you do not love him, you dare not!"

"No, no, Heaven help me! I can never love him, and he is my betrothed husband. Mark, why did you come! It will kill me to part from you, and so suffer all the torture afresh. I am ill; and oh! Mark, is it not a blessed thing there is a chance that I may die? God is good; He knows life is hard for me to bear apart from you. I shall be glad to die, for then I shall be forgiven!"

Her wild words sent Mark's thoughts back to the death-scene he had so recently witnessed, and he shuddered. It was so horrible to think of his beautiful Vashti still and cold in death. Oh! he could not bear to think of it—so young, so beautiful, so beloved. He clasped her closer with a sad heart-sinking, pressing burning kisses on her lips, her eyes, her hair.

Presently she withdrew herself with a deep blush, for she shudderingly remembered she had no longer the right to be so caressed by any but her betrothed husband—her betrothed husband. And oh! it would be death to endure such caressing from him. She sank down among her cushions, and hid her abashed face with her hands.

Mark noticed how thin and transparent they had grown, and his heart sank heavily. He believed trouble was slowly but surely killing her, and a great resolve came to him—he would save her in spite of himself. Hastily seeking himself beside her, he said firmly,

"Vashti, leave off crying, and tell me how

and why this engagement was forced upon you; for I do not believe you were false to your vows to me of your own free will. Speak, child! your confidence shall be for ever sacred. You told me, when last we were together, that you had a secret shared by Carl Gonthar; now I demand that secret from you. Surely 'tis my due! My wrongs must have some claim on you! Speak, Vashti for the sake of my love and faith in you!"

Vashti looked up with a flash of her old spirit, and said, "Mark I am as pure as when you found me; so far I have been false to you by words alone. My secret, as you call it, is not mine; it concerns others. Swear never to divulge it; and I will confide in you, lest you wrong yourself and me, by unfounded suspicion."

Then with her true eyes on his she told him the story of Percy's sin, and its consequences. As he listened in amazed silence, a great anger arose in his heart against those who had exacted so cruel a sacrifice from her.

Twice did he make her detail to him accurately every circumstance of the story.

Then a sudden inspiration seemed to come to him, and he said,—

"I see a way to save you, if you will trust me entirely—a way to at least separate you from this villain. Now I must put your faith in me to the proof. Listen to my plans!"

(To be continued.)

SURELY Barnum is irrepressible. Anything from a gnat up to a pachyderm seems to come within the practical range of his speculations. Now that he has acquired Jumbo, he longs to become the possessor of a second enjoying that title. This animal, though, is not an elephant, but a diminutive specimen of the equine race belonging to Lady Brooke, and some time since the indefatigable showman wrote to her ladyship asking her to part with it. The height of this Lilliputian steed is exactly twenty-eight inches. It follows its fair owner like a dog,

even "upstairs and downstairs and in my lady's chamber." No one is able to catch it but Lady Brooke, who is generally appealed to in order to take it into the stable where it sleeps. The pony not infrequently accompanies its mistress in her walks, resting contentedly to graze outside any house she may happen to enter. It goes unshod, and objects to be touched by anyone except Lady Brooke, whom it is always delighted to see, rearing on its hind legs whenever she enters the stall in which it is located.—*Society.*

AFTER TWO CENTURIES AND A HALF.—A lock of hair once bestowed by some generous maid upon a too secretive lover has just been discovered in an oak tree three feet six inches in diameter, which was sawn up into planks. One of these planks found its way to a carpenter's shop, where it attracted attention by an odd-looking branch-like knot traversing its substance. This knot, excised from the tree out of sheer curiosity by one of the workmen, proved to be a peg of yew, containing a lock of bright red hair, to which, as the objects "in amber" referred to by Pope in his epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, were peculiarly applicable the lines: "The things, we know, are neither rich nor rare, but wonder how the devil they got there!" Further investigation demonstrated that a hole had been bored into the trunk of the tree with an auger, and that the plug, freighted with love's gift, had been driven into the aperture thus opened for it. In course of time the wound inflicted upon the tree had healed over the plug so effectually that the portion of the trunk under which the ruddy lock lay concealed exhibited no fewer than two hundred and fifty "rings," each one representing a year's growth of the brave old oak, chosen A.D. 1632 as the hiding-place of his sweetheart's ringlet. The difficulty of keeping a secret forever has seldom been more quaintly illustrated than by the accident by which this sturdy heart of oak has been compelled to yield up its charge after keeping it for two centuries and a-half.



[HER HERO—HER MASTER.]

A LOST VENTURE.

CHAPTER I.

"You don't mean half you say, Di—you know you don't!"

"I know I do!"

And the proud beauty flitted her fan, and looked supremely indifferent as her companion went on,—

"You don't; I know you better than you know yourself sometimes, and—"

"Are you sure of that, little one?"

"Quite sure, now and then. Quite sure about this; I saw the tears in your eyes when Major Thornaby was reading the story of that defense the other day, and he said—"

"Ah! spare me any of Major Thornaby's raptures, Vi, if you love me; he is something twaddly in his rhapsodies at the best of times. And I remember his being very prosy on the occasion you refer to, perhaps it was that brought tears to my eyes; though I deny most emphatically that there were any there!"

"There were two big ones when he said he should like to be a lad again—such an one as either of these two—and he never could give effect to that story because of the big lump that came into his throat every time he spoke of it!"

"Major Thornaby is—well—an old woman!"

Diana Halliday said, chasing the gnats away with her fan, and seeming to be intent on that operation and nothing else. "And I don't think the gentlemen in question would care to be called 'lads' even by him, Violet, my dear. I am quite sure Captain Brunton would not. I don't know much of the other person's sentiments."

"They are lads as compared to Major Thornaby," the girl Miss Halliday had called Violet, rejoined; "and I know Darcie—that is Captain Brunton—would not mind what an old friend called him; and I fancy 'the

other person; as you call him, likes the major too well to care about such a trifle."

"Call him Darcie, you little goose, and don't look at me like a lamb in a passion!" laughed Miss Halliday. "Ferocity does not become you, Miss Vandaleur. The other person ought to be much obliged to you for your championship; I'll tell him when he comes back what a brave lance you have carried in his behalf."

And she put her arm round her cousin's waist—for that was the relationship between them—and kissed her with a sudden and rare caress, born of some new feeling that was underlying her careless and proud exterior. She was a lovely girl, this daughter and heiress of Sir John Halliday. A girl with flashing dark eyes, and a clear brunette complexion that told of a southern origin. Her mother had had Italian blood in her veins, hence the dusky beauty that always seemed to associate Diana Halliday with orange groves, and soft moonlight and dreamy summer nights, when nature is at her loveliest.

She was mistress of her father's house—for her mother had been dead for many a year. And the succession of governesses that had held sway till she was old enough to do without them, had one and all been obliged to take second rank and be the governed instead of the rulers. There had been a danger that Diana Halliday would grow up wild and untamable; but the fiery-tempered and impulsive girl had one great safeguard—her love for her father; an affection by means of which she might be made to do anything, no matter how disagreeable to her own feelings.

She learned to "please papa." She was obedient when appealed to through the medium of her affection, and she had escaped the fate that her long-suffering governesses predicted for her, and had grown up, if proud and self-willed, beautiful and fascinating beyond the power of resistance. The servants adored her, though she was imperious and her will had to be law, no matter how distasteful. And the people round about—the poor especially—wor-

shipped her in the same fashion. Even rivals—and there were many in the county—admitted her beauty and her charms, though they said, behind her back, after the manner of young ladies, that they could not imagine what all the men saw in her that no one else had a chance when she was by!

Violet Vandaleur, Sir John's ward and niece, his daughter's pet and dearest companion, was cast in a different mould. She was small and fair, with hair like trapped sunbeams, and a wild-rose sort of a complexion, that was as bewitching in its way as Diana's dark beauty. She had never known her parents; they had died in India of cholera, within a day of each other, just as they were preparing to come home and make a place for themselves and their daughter in the world of English life.

Violet had been sent home too young to recollect either of them, and her only remembrance of her father and mother would be loving letters and pretty presents sent home by almost every mail—letters that made her weep whenever she looked at them and read the loving words of hope and expectation that filled the thin paper, and which had all turned out such a mockery. Plans for their future life, promises of what they would do and have; affectionate anticipation of the life the mother and daughter would lead together—all had been dropped from the dear hands that had not even warning enough of what was before them to pen a farewell to the loved and loving child waiting for them at home.

"Violet must come and live with us, papa," had been Miss Halliday's instant dictum when the sad news came; and Sir John, albeit he had no particular fancy for another young lady about the house—deeming, perhaps, his imperious daughter all-sufficient—consented, as he would have consented to anything Diana had proposed, even if he had not pitied and loved his dead sister's child as he did.

Violet had been at school when the terrible news came of her orphanage, and though she was shocked and disappointed at the change

in her life she had seen so little of her parents and known nothing of them save through letters, that she accepted her new home, and took Diana for her sister and Sir John for her father with an alacrity that might have seemed unfeeling to those who did not know her.

It was all a thing of the past now, and the "Sycamores" seemed as if it had been her home all her life. She had shared Diana's games and her affection, and her father's love, and five happy, peaceful years had drifted by now, since she came a pale, pale girl, in deep mourning to be comforted and amused by her splendid cousin.

Sir John had never suspected that the he had taken in offering the lonely girl a home with him. He had given some attention to Violet's paternal relations by taking possession of her so completely, and they chose rather to ignore her existence in consequence.

But the only one who would have received her was a younger brother of her father's, Squire Vandaleur, of Compton Royal, in Northumberland—a free-living, roystering sort of man, with a wife who was "loud" so say the least of it, and whose numerous family were dragged up in a scrambling sort of fashion—the boys dunces, as to their heads, but unequalled riders and sportsmen; and the girls horsey and slangy, and preferring the companionship of the grooms and helpers, and the literature of the stables, to any other or more feminine amusement.

Violet Vandaleur, with her refinement and her beauty, would have been as much out of place amongst them as a lady's lap dog amongst a pack of hounds, and she rejoiced greatly at the decree that sent her to her mother's kindred instead of her father's.

"I should have died of them, Di!" she said to her cousin, when they talked the matter over. "I don't like kennels and stables, and I think guns ought to be kept in a room to themselves and not left all over the house. I was there one vacation and they nearly frightened me to death. And the place was so dirty!"

Poor Violet, with her fastidious organisation and her innate refinement, could not bear anything untidy or approaching uncleanness—and the Vandaleur household came perilously near being very dirty. The boys left their belongings about to be put away by anyone self-sacrificing enough to attend to them; and the girls considered it "flicking" to be tidy, and strewed the house with feminine litter till the rooms were scarcely habitable.

Violet gave great offence by her exceeding inquisitiveness about going there again, and her maternal nuncle was accused of trying to bias her that he might get possession of her if anything happened.

The Vandaleurs were always possessed with the notion that something would happen. They looked upon India as a place where people were sure to die; and in this instance they were right, and though they had no reason to complain when Dalton Vandaleur's will was read and their handsome legacy forwarded to them, they always felt sore that they had not also the handling of Violet's large fortune and the administration of her affairs.

The fortune lost nothing by the management of Sir John Halliday. He would as soon have thought of robbing a church as doing anything unjust to the orphan girl under his charge; and he made her an ample allowance and invested the rest of her money in such a fashion that the fortune had grown till it was reported that Miss Vandaleur was an heiress to an almost fabulous amount.

It was more than Diana would ever inherit, and she would be amply dowered when the time came for her father to give her away to any one else.

But she had reached her twentieth year, and there seemed no likelihood at present of any such event happening.

She had lovers in plenty, this merry, haughty, something-spoiled daughter of the baronet.

But hitherto she had sent them all to the

right-about with something that savoured of scorn. And the young men had gone away abashed, and consoled themselves and one another by saying that Miss Halliday "was so awfully clever and all that, don't you know, that a fellow hadn't a chance with her."

Clever enough she was, and "all that," too—if all that meant having a good stock of common sense, and knowing what manner of man she would like for her husband.

"He mustn't be a blind slave who will bow down and worship the hem of my garment," she said to Violet, whose loving little heart was already caught and given away for all time to Captain Darcie Branton, as brave and gallant an officer as ever wore Her Majesty's uniform, tall, handsome, and rich withal. "I want a man, and neither a money bag nor a simpering dandy! I must have a man, my dear, when I choose a husband, some one who will say, 'Do this or do that,' and I shall do it like a lamb."

"Then don't look upon the earth, Di," Violet said, laughing, "only fancy any one saying such things to you."

"I am fancying it, and I rather think should like it," Miss Halliday said, composedly. "I should like a man like a dog, who would spend his life fetching and carrying if I only said the word. I want brains, and inches as well, and a handsome face and a name that a woman could be proud of."

"And Stafford Lennox, who has all the qualifications, eh, Di? Brains and inches and a handsome face, like an Apollo. I heard you say so only the other day, and in altogether a man that a woman might be proud of."

"Don't talk nonsense, my dear," Miss Halliday said, "and don't give your mind to thinking that I am going to take anybody, not even Stafford Lennox. He is handsome, I dare say, and I don't doubt his bravery. Every British officer is brave, of course. What would become of the men if they were not? But I don't think the gentleman in question is the man to make a good master to any woman. He thinks too much of himself."

"Oh, Di! he is as near perfection as possible."

"That's a very undutiful speech for you to make, Miss Vandaleur. How would Captain Branton like to hear you say that of any man?"

"He would like me to say it of his friend, I am sure. I don't love him any the less because I can see that Colonel Lennox is good and nice and handsome, too. He isn't like Darcie, of course, and—"

"Of course not, you little goose. Leave me to find my own hero, child. I shall do it some day, I dare say. If I do not—"

"What will you do then?"

Either settle down into an old maid, and oh! what a tartar I shall be—I pity my servants in anticipation—or take the first man that offers me and tyrannise over him instead. I must either be mistress or slave, and between you and me, Violet, my dear, I should prefer the slavery. A man that can't hold his own where a woman is concerned isn't worth his salt."

"What odd ideas you have, Di," Miss Vandaleur said.

"Born of mature reflection and the contemplation of my friends' non-success in their matrimonial speculations," Miss Halliday replied, composedly. "Be content with your own felicity, child, and leave me alone."

"I am content—more than content," Violet replied, and her eyes filled with tears as she spoke, "there never was a girl so blessed as I am."

"Time will show," her cousin said, quietly; "it brings quantities of things to light in a man's character does matrimony."

Violet Vandaleur was a lucky girl, as she had said.

Her future husband was wealthy, good, and handsome—three qualifications that few girls can resist—and he and the gentleman she had called Stafford Lennox were expected home from Africa in a very few weeks.

Violet had begun to count the hours almost till she should see the man she loved again.

The papers were ringing with glowing accounts of the heroism of both gentlemen, who were fast friends, and had joined in a chivalric defence of an almost forced position, and quite an ovation was expected when they set foot in England again after their dangers and escape.

CHAPTER II.

"Well, girls, so our heroes have landed!"

So spoke Sir John Halliday about a week after the conversation recorded in the last chapter, addressing his daughter and niece as he met them in the breakfast-room, his hands full of letters and papers.

"But I suspect that is not news. I see Vi and you, too, have your letters; I sent them down half an hour ago by Sawford."

"Vi's here, if you like papa—not mine, no. It is no news. Can't you see from the state of Miss Vandaleur's eyelashes that she has nearly dissolved herself in tears already over the event. Don't begin again, there's a dear child, or there will be positively nothing of you left by the time that the gentlemen arrive. I suppose they are coming here straight, papa?"

"Of course, my dear."

"And all Gillhampton will turn out to meet them, and Vi will be quite a heroine, and there will be speeches, and what the stable-men call 'buttering up,' and—ah! never mind, my chaff, dear," Miss Halliday added hastily, as Violet's eyes filled with tears, the result of agitated excitement; and she looked as if she were on the verge of a burst of tears. "It is a proud thing to have any part in such a reception. I shall be out in the cold."

"You needn't be!"

"Be quiet, miss. I say I am," Diana retorted, and Sir John looked up with an amused face.

"The mistress of the Sycamores will hardly be that in anything that goes on here," he said. "Be civil to the colonel, Di, for my sake, if not for your own. He has stood face to face with a fearful death since he was here last, and without blenching; remember that when you feel inclined to snub him."

"He would not be Colonel Lennox if there had been anything of the poison about him," Miss Halliday said, coolly, handing her plate for some game pie as composedly as if she were talking of some one she had seen yesterday. "Major Thornaby is gone to meet them, I suppose."

"Yes; there was quite an ovation at Southampton. The papers say such an episode in a war as 'Barber's Run' does not occur often. Make yourselves smart, girls, and do the honours of the Sycamores in your very best style."

"Make ourselves smart!" Miss Halliday said, when her father had left the room. "I wonder what men's ideas of smartness are. My notions will incline to maslin dresses and garden hats this hot day. Come along, Vi; we will make the house smart at all events. Flowers shall welcome them if our dresses don't."

The Sycamores were some forty miles from Southampton, quite enough in the direct route to London, to give the two officers an excuse for breaking their journey there. And indeed they would have gone out of their way to make their first visit in England there—Darcie Branton because of his love, Stafford Lennox ostensibly because Sir John was his father's oldest friend, privately maybe for the sake of Sir John's daughter.

Violet Vandaleur was not very far-seeing, perhaps; but she had her own notions of the state of Diana's feelings with regard to the handsome young officer with whose name all Europe was ringing just now, and she was not in the least surprised when she knocked at her bedroom door a few minutes after her speech about the flowers to be refused admittance.

"Wait a minute, dear," Miss Halliday said,

in a tone very unlike her usual merry speech "I will come directly."

The laughter was gone out of her voice for a few brief minutes; and could Violet have peeped at her cousin she would have seen that her face was wet with tears—tears of joy at the safe return of the man she loved, though she would not acknowledge the fact even to herself.

"You are a fool, Diana Halliday!" she said to herself, looking at her tearful face in the glass, and dabbing her red eyes with *eau de Cologne*—"a senseless, idiotic fool! For all you know the man may be engaged three deep—he looks just the sort of man to have lots of brides elect! Most likely his ideal of womanly beauty and goodness is some squirming creature, who faints at the sight of a lily, and lives up to a teapot. That's the fashion now-a-days; and dresses in gaudy green, turned up with terra cotta. Men don't want sense in these degenerate days—only affectation; and I dare say Colonel Lennox isn't a bit better than the rest of them! You can come in now, Vi; I have done adorning myself."

She threw open the door as she spoke, and Violet noticed the red eyes and the flattered manner, and said nothing, only laughed a little satisfied laugh to herself.

"You look glorious, Di!" she said; and indeed Miss Halliday, in her creamy muslin dress, and her bunches of deep yellow flowers, looked like the dream of some colour-haunted artist.

"And you look like the queen of the fairies, child!" was the elder girl's retort, and she drew her cousin to the great glass, and surveyed the picture it presented with much satisfaction.

"It isn't many golden-haired women that have the same sense as you in matters of dress," she said, stroking the fair head, that made such a charming contrast to her own dark tresses. "They generally choose to go in for scarlets and yellows, and all sorts of *outré* colours. You have the common sense to see what is becoming, and make a sylph of yourself instead of a Bacchante. Captain Darcie Brunton is a lucky man, little cousin!"

"And I am a lucky girl, Di! Come along, and get the flowers before it gets too hot; we shall not have time to arrange them if you do not hurry."

"I never hurry, my dear; but I am quite ready. We will have Muggins and a basket, and we will soon get enough to make the place gay."

It went to Muggins's heart to cut what his young mistress ordered in the way of choice flowers.

He loved them as if they were sentient things, and liked to see them where they grew, and not in hot rooms; but he had studied his papers, and knew what they were wanted for, and his enthusiasm was not less than that of his mistress.

"If flowers can speak a welcome to them they shall have them," he said, as he cut blossom after blossom. "There's nothing in England good enough for them, that there isn't!"

"Thank you, Muggins," Violet said; and Diana laughed and told the old man that she shouldn't fail to tell the gentlemen of his admiration.

"You ought to have been a soldier, Muggins," she said.

"So I ought, miss—so I ought," Muggins replied, "and should have been. Nothing would have kept me from it if there had been any one to look after my mother; but she was all alone, and I couldn't have rested, knowing she had no one to keep a place for her in her old years. So I gave up the notion, though my heart was in it—I don't say it wasn't!"

"And you were as great a hero as the two who are coming home to-day," Miss Halliday said, in her unconcerned manner—"every bit as great, Muggins. It takes more trouble and pain to conquer one's self sometimes than to battle with a whole horde of savages. I want

the very best roses you can give me, mind! They will help to take the smell of gunpowder out of the gentlemen's noses, perhaps. I'll make a pyramid of roses in the drawing-room, Vi, and crown it with that big 'Marshall Neil' there. He looks like a hero, does he not?"

The pyramid of roses was made, and the rest of the flowers distributed, and lunch laid ready in the dining-room, and the girls fell into the silence that is born of deep feeling and listened for the sound of wheels and the tramp of horses.

Presently they came—a *posse* of gentlemen riding up the avenue. Sir John had sent horses to meet them, riding to the station himself with more than one neighbour, who had heard of the return, and were anxious to welcome the heroes of the proud story of heroism and danger that had come across the sea.

There was a moment's delighted greeting—"a chaos of entanglement," as Diana called it afterwards; and then Darcie Brunton managed to draw his darling away from the rest into the pretty breakfast parlour, and take her in his loving arms, and whisper how glad he was to hold her there again.

"I thought it would never be, little Vi," he said: "when the black fellows were swarming up our poor defences. It was one man against a hundred—and the hundred had the best of it!"

"Ah! don't talk of it," Violet said, with a shiver. "I have never been able to get it out of my head since I heard of it. I have fancied you cut all to pieces, Darcie, and—"

"And I have come home whole," he said, turning off the quiver of her lips with a kiss, and looking at her with assuring eyes, "and not much the worse. Lennox fared worse than I did; he got an ugly wound in his arm, which will give him some trouble yet, I am afraid. But I must not monopolize you, child. You must come and talk to the other visitors. There is one come especially to see you."

"To see me?"

"Just so!"

"Who is it?"

"Guess!"

"I can't. I don't know any one."

"Your cousin, Arthur Vandaleur. You have not forgotten him?"

"I haven't forgotten any of them," Violet said, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders.

"Only I don't want to see any of them again. What has he come for?"

"Sir John asked him. There has been a coolness between your father's and your mother's relations since you came home to England, and I think your uncle would like to set things right a bit. Anyway, he asked Mr. Vandaleur to come home with us, and see his little cousin."

"I wish he hadn't; they are all so slaugy and coarse. I can't bear them!"

"I think this one is a favourable specimen. He seems gentlemanly and quiet enough. From something he said I don't think he knows that I have any particular interest in you, my darling."

"Then don't tell him!" Violet said. "Oh! I wish he hadn't come—I don't want him. I'm sure. Don't let any one tell him anything about it. I don't want him to question me, and talk as I know he would. Perhaps he will go away soon!"

"I believe Sir John has asked him to stay a week."

"Oh, dear!" said Violet, in dismay. "What shall we do with him? I know Di won't like him, and I detest the whole set of them. If you could only see their house, and hear the girls talk, you would understand why."

"I think I do understand," Captain Brunton answered, with a smile. "I have heard of the Vandaleur household. But you needn't be afraid of any one or anything now I am come back, my darling. I know how to take care of my treasure."

There was shelter and protection from any number of cousins in the loving voice and the

encircling arm; and Violet went to the room, where her cousin and the other gentlemen were—feeling relieved by the presence of the man she loved, and with all her troubles and agitation sent to the winds by the knowledge of her great happiness.

It was a pleasant meal—the luncheon that the two girls had ordered with such care and forethought—and the man or woman must have been hard to please, indeed, that was not satisfied with the frank, open manner, and charming conversation of the two officers.

Arthur Vandaleur turned out much more agreeable than Violet had pictured him. He was a fairly handsome young fellow, with an easy manner as of a man who had mixed with the world, and seen things and people from all points of view.

He was evidently much attracted by his young cousin, whom he had not seen since she was a child, when her striking beauty was a thing of the future, and there was nothing remarkable about her but lankiness and shyness.

"We could not have done so well for her at our place," he said to Sir John, in speaking of her; "our surroundings would not have fitted her like this."

"No, I suppose not!" the Baronet said. "Violet is very like her name—of the striking order of girls."

"And my sisters are the very opposite!"

"That is not what I was going to say."

"It is the truth, though. Maggie and Polly would rather ride to hounds than sit down with any piece of woman's work in their hands. And our little cousin has an impression that guns go off of themselves, whether they are loaded or not; and, altogether, I am afraid we should not have suited her in the north. They will be glad to hear she is so happy when I go back."

"I am very glad to see you here," Sir John said, hospitably; "and I hope this meeting will only be the beginning of a better intimacy, Mr. Vandaleur."

"And I hope so, too!" the young man replied—and added to himself that it should not be his fault if the intimacy did not ripen into something that would lead to his marrying his cousin in due time.

Violet's fortune was not to be despised; and it was a pity that it should go out of the family.

He thought his cousin would marry him if the thing were brought about properly. He had never found the girls averse to him.

And then he was her cousin. It was just what her father, if he had been alive, would have liked. And he settled down to spend a very pleasant time at the Sycamores, ignorant of the fact that the girl he was looking upon as a neezy prey was the promised wife of a man worth a thousand of him in every qualification of a gentleman and an honourable man!

CHAPTER III.

The lunch was succeeded by another visit to the Sycamores—after the young officers had been to London and been fêted and petted to their heart's content, and more; for Colonel Lennox was heard to say that the hottest half-hour at Barker's Ban was easy work compared to the civilities of the London season, and the congratulations of the people who crowded to see them whenever there was a chance, and seemed to look upon them as part and parcel of a great show got up for their amusement.

Violet declared herself disappointed in them both—her own particular hero especially—that they did not respond more cordially to the good-will of the multitude. She was so proud of them that she would never tire of the adulation that was showered upon them, and wondered at their seeming coldness about the royal favours, and the decoration by the hand of the Queen herself.

"You don't seem to care a bit for the honour!" she said to Darcie Brunton, when he came again to the Sycamores a greater man

than ever, with the Victoria Cross in his valise to show his bride-elect, and half-a-score of honours besides that had not been his before.

"My darling!" he said, looking into her eager face with calm, serious eyes. "I do care for the honour; but when Her Majesty's hand touched my breast as she pinned that cross on my tunic, I went back in a flash to Barker's Run and saw the brave fellows that we had left lying there—men who ought to have stood beside us in her presence, and who were braver ten thousand times than we were. That cross will always seem to me a memento of the dead; and I think Lennox feels the same about it."

"I understand," Violet said, gently. "I had forgotten all that, and thought nothing of anything but the honour to you and Colonel Lennox. Oh! Darcie, I am so glad you have come back to me!"

"Not more glad than I am, dear. But why specially now—has anything happened?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Arthur Vandaleur!"

"Your cousin—what of him?"

"Oh! he is so dreadful, Darcie! He—"

"What?"

"He wants to marry me!"

"Does he?—that speaks well for his taste. I am rather glad the gentleman is not here. And so you would have none of him, eh, petite? He did not take long making up his mind that his cousin would make a nice little wife."

"Oh! don't laugh at me, Darcie. It was horrid!"

"I should imagine it was if you didn't want him! Tell me all about it. What did you say to him?"

"I don't know! I was frightened, I think, for I never thought of such a thing. And he wouldn't take a refusal from me, but went to my uncle."

"And what did Sir John say?"

"Not much, I fancy. I don't think he told him I was engaged. He only said that he would not give his consent. And I said I would not marry him—nothing could ever make me; and then he went away—but he was very angry. He said all sorts of horrible things about Uncle John. He accused him of trying to bias me, and to keep me here for the sake of the money; and he didn't behave like a gentleman at all. I was so thankful to see the last of him!"

"He is not a gentleman at heart!" Darcie Brunton said. "His father is of a good old stock, but his mother comes of nobody in particular. There's a bad strain somewhere, and that young man shows it. It always comes out sometime."

"But I come of the same stock, Darcie!" and Violet nestled up to her lover's side and smiled in his face. "How if the bad strain shows itself in me?"

"Your mother was a lady, child," was the quiet reply, "and your father the best man that ever lived—I have heard my father say so, and they were fast friends—and their child is worthy of her parents."

"But suppose I were not, Darcie, would you love me just as much? would you care for me if I were to do something bad, as some girls do, and call it a joke? My cousins used to."

"Don't imitate them in anything if you love me, Violet; they are not fit to be mentioned in the same breath as my pure little wood-flower. You couldn't do anything that would make me love you less, child; you would not be Violet Vandaleur if you did."

"I like to think that!" the girl said, with a strange persistence that might have been prearranged. "I like to think that, come what will—disgrace, ruin, anything—you would never alter, Darcie!"

"I could not alter, my darling. What makes you harp on such a theme?" the young man said, drawing her closer to him and looking in her sweet eyes. "Come what may, you will always be the same to me! I am afraid what you have told me of has upset you. I

wish with all my heart that that young upstart had never come near this place!"

"So do I with all my heart. I am afraid of him, Darcie; there is mischief in him. I don't know what or why, but there is an evil look in his eyes and a nasty curl in his mouth that are frightful sometimes when he does not think anyone is looking at him!"

"I shall get Sir John to take you to London for a while," Captain Brunton said, gravely; "your nerves have been worked upon more than is good for you. Put that fellow out of your head, and take me in instead. We must fix the day for our wedding, now that the African business is over and I have a chance of staying at home long enough to take a wife."

"I should like Diana to be married at the same time as me," Violet said, demurely.

And her lover laughed as he stooped and kissed her.

"I can't fancy Diana allowing herself to be married to anyone!" he said. "Who is the happy man, petite?"

"She will marry Colonel Lennox when he asks her," Violet replied. "He will win her if he goes the right way to work!"

"You far-seeing little person, how do you know?"

"Oh! I see quantities of things; and I know from all that she has said, and the way she has laughed at him and ridiculed the notion of there being anything in what he did out in Africa, that—"

"That's the oddest way of showing love I ever heard of!" Darcie said, laughing. "I shouldn't augur much good fortune from such proceedings as ridicule and irony."

"You don't know Diana as I do. If she had not felt deeply she would have said nothing at all; it was to hide what she really did feel that she used to chaff and say my ecstasies were enough for both of us. I dare say they were, but she cried over the accounts that came home; and she had all the flowers in the garden out the day you came home to decorate the house; and it wasn't for your sake, Darcie. And she cried so that morning that she was hardly fit to be seen, and—"

"And, in short, you think she is in love with Lennox! I know one thing—he loves her with all his heart, and the love of a man like that is not a thing to be thrown aside like an old glove. I hope she will not say him nay, and make his life barren; he is worthy of better things than to have it spoiled by a woman!"

She did not say him nay. Could the lovers have seen her—even while they were speculating about her and her future—they would have been quite satisfied that she was not quite the heartless girl she chose to show herself sometimes.

Her sitting-room looked on to a pretty garden that had been her mother's—the prettiest bit of garden about the Sycamores; for it had been a fancy of the late Lady Halliday to have it like an old-fashioned farmhouse garden, and she forbade any formal pruning and training of plants to make them grow as the gardeners wished, and not as nature intended. Scrupulous neatness was insisted on; but the flowers were fragrant and the birds tame, and there were no prettier nooks anywhere about than were found in the shady corners of "my lady's garden," as the servants called it, and Diana loved it as well as her mother had done.

The windows were open, and the birds outside were singing their merriest lays, and Diana Halliday sat there dreaming with the soft scent of the flowers and the hum of the bees filling the sweet summer air. Her thoughts wandered to "Barker's Run," a household word now in England, and the brave defence and the rewards that had been showered upon the heroes of that day of danger and bravery.

"Worthy of it! aye is he!" she said, softly, half aloud, and her thoughts were not of Darcie Brunton; "worthy of all that could be bestowed upon him, my hero—my master, if he but choose to say the word!"

A shadow fell across the sunlight, and the

man whose name was trembling on her lips—whose image was in her heart—stood before her.

"Colonel Lennox!" she exclaimed, starting up in surprise and confusion.

"I believe I am trespassing," he said. "In my fashion of taking short cuts I got over the gate; I had not an idea I was coming across your private garden. Pray forgive me."

"I am very glad to see you there," she said, more gentle in her manner than was usual with her. She did not say come in, but her look invited him, and he stepped into the cool, shady room.

"This is my own sanctum," she said, pushing him a chair, "sacred to me and papa and Violet. You are privileged, I can assure you, and I hope you will duly appreciate the honour."

"I do, from my heart! Branton has forsaken me; he has paired off with Miss Vandaleur, and they are discussing their future in the summer-house yonder. Sir John is gone to the farm, but my arm is troubling me a little this morning, and I did not feel in trim for anything like exercise."

"I should think you have had enough exercise to last you some time," Diana said, bending her flushed face over some feminine trifle of work with which she was pretending to be occupied, "out in Africa I mean."

"Out yonder! Ah, yes! It was hot work while it lasted. We didn't know much about the luxury of a bed, or regular eating and drinking. Life is a scramble in the field, I can assure you, Miss Halliday."

"An awful realization of a bad dream, I should think," Miss Halliday replied, "but you have had your reward since; you have won the people's worship and the Queen's favour, and the cross."

"Oh! yes, the cross; but that is nothing!"

"Nothing!"

"I mean a fellow does not think about that bit of bronze when he is doing anything that is likely to give it to him. It is duty and the business that is in hand when he is in danger, that he thinks of then."

"Will you show me your cross?" Diana lifted her head and spoke hurriedly and eagerly, and he looked at her in astonishment. Where was all her indifference and coldness gone to? Her face had a new expression in it that he had never seen there before.

"Have you never seen one?" he asked.

"Only in Captain Branton's hand the other evening," she replied, "and there was so much chatter over it that I could not ask questions about it. I am very ignorant about such things."

Stafford Lennox went to his room and fetched the little case that had such a significant meaning, and laid it open on the table by her side. She looked at the little thing with grave interest.

"And the Queen's hand gave you this?" she said. "How proud you must be of it!"

Stafford Lennox smiled, and answered her almost as his friend had answered Violet.

"Proud!" he said, sadly. "I don't know. It is an honour, I suppose, and a man is very glad to have it, but it is a sad one, Miss Halliday. You know the old Scotch song—the fish-wife's song—what she says of her herrings,—

'Ye may ca' them vulgar fairin'
Wives an' mither's maist despairin'
Ca' them wives o' men!'

That little cross, is 'lives o' men' to me. The lives of fifty brave fellows, any one of whom would have given his life for mine—any one of whom was better worthy than I am to win and wear the decoration. It is only the fortune of war that has given it to me, Miss Halliday."

For Diana's head was bowed and her face was hidden on the hands that held the cross underneath them.

"Forgive me!" he said. "I should not touch upon such topics with a lady. The details of such a business as Barker's Run are not fit for your ears; but you—"

"I wanted to see the cross, yes," said Diana,

raising her head, but keeping her face turned from him; "and I wanted to hear about it, but not when everyone was bursting out into inane praises of what they did not understand. There may have been a hundred there worthy of it, but the worthiest has won it, Colonel Lennox."

She pushed the cross towards him as she spoke, and there was a tear drop on it. Stafford Lennox's heart stood still as he looked at her. Was there a vein of deep feeling, after all, hidden under the exterior of carelessness and satire? For a moment he could not speak, but words came to him at last, though low and trembling.

"Miss Halliday," he said; "Diana," for by that dear name I have thought of you all through the long weary months when death stared me in the face by day, and stood by my pillow at night. Shall I tell you whose image it was that inspired me when any bravery was wanted—who stood between me and death in that horrible struggle—whose sweet eyes were looking down upon me while the army of devils were sweeping down upon us like a flood? I thought of you and I seemed to have a charmed life; I breathed your name and blows that rained upon me seemed to do me no harm. I thought of life with you and could not die; I was spared—say, was it for happiness with you, or—"

He took her hands, unresisting now, and looked into her face; he had taken her by surprise and won: she had found her master, and he had won a greater victory than Barker's Run.

"Speak, sweet Di. Tell me that you love me," he said, softly.

And she bent her proud head, and said, falteringly,—

"I think I loved you before you went away, Stafford!"

CHAPTER IV.

FOUND her master! Yes, the stately beauty was a bond slave—caught and caged—and wonderfully happy in her bondage.

Violet laughed, and declared that Colonel Lennox had bought Diana with his cross; but she knew, in her heart, that it was the noble character of the brave soldier that had won her cousin, and she rejoiced with her with all her warm, little heart.

Diana would have no sympathy in her new happiness. The thing was done, she declared, in her usual *nonchalant* fashion, and there was no occasion for gush over it.

If Colonel Lennox was going to hang round the place like a tame cat she should undo it all again, and have nothing further to do with him or matrimony.

Violet was horrified at her; and her father, delighted at the prospect that such a union offered to his beloved child, though he was deeply grieved at the thought of losing her, lectured her on the enormity of her conduct; but the Colonel only laughed, and said he had a good deal of the cat about him. He could understand when he was driven away, but he should return, and seize his prey when he was least expected.

"You little goose!" Diana said to her cousin, when Violet expostulated with her on the extreme harshness of her demeanour to the man she had accepted; "do you think that Stafford and I don't understand each other? Would you have me fling myself into his arms after every half-hour's separation, and favour him with floods of tears upon every possible occasion? A modified edition of such transports is becoming in you and small persons of the kitten order of women; but it would be outrageously idiotic of me to indulge in gush. Leave me and Stafford alone, child, and attend to your own love-making."

"I wouldn't be so cold to Darcie for all the wide world as you are to the Colonel," Violet said, oracularly—she had been engaged six months, and was therefore an authority. "He would think I did not love him."

"Ah! you have educated him to expect it,"

Diana said, quietly. "Colonel Lennox and I are staid, elderly people, and, as I said before, we understand each other."

That they did. Stafford Lennox was well content to endure the sharp speeches and seeming indifference of the woman he loved so well, knowing, as he did, that she had given him her whole heart.

She was chary of her caresses, but they meant volumes when she did bestow them. There was more earnestness in one of Diana's soft kisses—so rarely given—and more purpose in half-a-dozen of her gentle words, when they did come, than in all Violet's lavish endearments; and Stafford Lennox knew it, and was satisfied.

"It was worth Barker's Run to have won this reward," he said to Sir John, when they were discussing the matter. "Diana is the only woman I have ever cared for in my life. If she had said me nay, I should have never married."

"You think so," the Baronet replied, "but there are other girls in plenty, Colonel Lennox!"

"Not for me! The earth has only held one for me ever since I knew what the love of a man's whole heart for one woman meant; and that one was your daughter."

"She is worthy of it," Sir John said. "My girl is a good girl, and one of whom any father might well be proud. She is wilful and strange in her manner to the outside world, but in her home—ah! the pang that it will be to me to part with her will tell what she has been in her home."

Sir John paused for a moment, and then, as if he could not trust himself to speak further on that subject, he said suddenly,—

"Have you heard anything of young Vandaleur lately?"

"Not for some weeks! Why?"

"I have another letter from him this morning, pestering me to let him marry Violet. The child would not have him even if she were free. I must explain to him how matters stand, and make an end of the business. It was very foolish not to tell him when I had him here; but the little one had some feeling against it, and I must say the young fellow did not behave in a fashion to invite any confidence. He chose to consider himself wronged in that Violet would have none of him, and accused me in plain terms of trying to bias her. Poor child! if she had chosen her cousin instead of Captain Brunton I should have let her have her own way, I expect; though I am more glad than I can tell you that there was no chance of that. I don't like Arthur Vandaleur!"

"Nor I!"

"He is very plausible, and has the outward manners of a gentleman; but I fancy he leads rather a shady sort of life in town, and knows more of the mysteries of the betting-ring and the gambling fraternity in general than I should like in Violet's husband. I am thankful, when I think of it, that she is safe."

"Why did you ask him here, if it isn't a rude question?" Colonel Lennox asked. "He is hardly your sort."

"Not at all; but I felt that I should like to put an end to the sense of wrong that there has always been between the families about Violet and her fortune. You see her father's relations always imagined they should have the custody of the child if ever anything happened to her parents, and they were very sore when she was willed, as it were, to me."

"It was a good thing for her!"

"Yes, I think it was! I may say that much without any egotism," Sir John said. "The Squire is a good fellow, and means well; but he is weak and yielding, and his wife and children rule him entirely, and Mrs. Vandaleur is not quite the sort of person to bring up a girl, according to my old-fashioned notions."

"Hardly!" and Colonel Lennox laughed, as he thought of the fast, careless household, which he had once seen when the family were

in town—an event of rare occurrence—and the slangy, untidy girls, and horsey boys that composed it. "Miss Vandaleur has been fortunate in coming into your household. If I were you I would explain how matters stand, and put an end to young Vandaleur's notions of marrying her at once."

"I can't understand him!" Sir John said. "He seems to think he has a right to Violet because she is his cousin, and his letter is almost a threat. He accuses me of wanting to keep her fortune to myself, or something tantamount to it, and hints that if the young lady were allowed her own way she might be content to listen to him, and to love him, as he declares he loves her—though when the love had time to come to anything I can't imagine. Vi would have nothing to say to him when he was here."

"He is insufferably impertinent, and I should put an end to it at once," Colonel Lennox said, decisively.

He knew more of Arthur Vandaleur than he would tell his kind host, and quite understood the motives that made the young man hanker after his cousin, or rather her money-bags. Such a match would save him from difficulties innumerable, and give him a position in society that it was his ambition to attain.

Sir John took the Colonel's advice, and wrote to Arthur Vandaleur, telling him his cousin was engaged, and thought there was an end of the matter. So there was in all outward seeming.

Mr. Vandaleur wrote back very politely to the Baronet, and something oddly to his cousin, congratulating her on her forthcoming marriage, which had been kept such a secret.

Darcie Brunton also had a letter of congratulation which puzzled him not a little, and made him remark that Arthur Vandaleur was a most polite young gentleman, though evidently something envious withal.

Violet put her letter away, hoping she should never have anything more to do with her north-country cousins, who seemed anything but agreeable; and after a while the family removed to London for the season, and she thought no more about them.

It was hardly London that Sir John selected. He hated being cooped up in dreary streets, he said, and he took a house in Kensington, with a garden and easy access to the park and gardens.

It was not too far for the young people to have all the enjoyment of the theatres and amusements, and the chaperon he selected for them amused themselves as they would, enjoying to the full the society of their respective lovers.

Society talked a good deal about the double wedding that was to take place in a very few months; it was to be the prettiest thing of the year, everyone declared. The marrying men who were inclined to throw the handkerchief to either of the beautiful heiresses were disappointed, and the aspiring young ladies to whom the handkerchief never seemed to come were immensely relieved to think that two such obstacles to their well-doing were removed.

Sir John had not spent a season in town for some time, and he had to select part of his establishment afresh.

Violet had no maid; she had shared Diana's attendant for some weeks through the illness of her own special maid, and Mrs. Chetwynd, the chaperon, undertook to procure her another. Various applicants presented themselves, and amongst them one to whom Violet took a wonderful fancy from the first. She was a Frenchwoman, but speaking English perfectly, and so superior in her manner and appearance, and withal so modest and quiet in her ways, that Miss Vandaleur declared that she would have her and no other.

"We will make all inquiries, my dear," Mrs. Chetwynd replied. "I must confess I do not much like the young person, but she is to your maid, not mine; it is for you to choose."

"Take care what you are about, Vi," Miss

Halliday said, "That's not a true woman; she will work you mischief somehow."

"How prejudiced you are! I!" Violet said, "I like her so much."

"Because she is past mistress in the art of flattery child, that is all; she is plausible, but not trustworthy."

"I think you are unjust! She didn't flatter me a bit."

"Not in words, perhaps, she knew better than that; but she did with her eyes and every turn of her head and trick of her face. She is a thorough actress."

"You and I never did like the same people," was Miss Vandaleur's rather short answer. She was a spoiled child; this pretty heiress, and liked her own way. "I mean to have Fantine if her character is all right, and she seems sure it will be. I like her very much, and she will understand my style I am sure."

"Of course you will have your own way child, you always do; but take care! If you have that woman don't trust her, that's all; keep that little tongue of yours still, and don't gossip to her."

"Oh, D! as if any lady ever gossiped with her maid."

"I don't!" Miss Halliday said, significantly, "but I rather think you do, little one. Keep this Frenchwoman at a distance if you engage her, and don't let her be mistress instead of servant, or she'll make you wish you had kept to my old Barbara."

Barbara had been Miss Halliday's maid all her life, and Mrs. Chetwynd held up her hands in horror when she heard that the young lady proposed to bring her to London and let her keep on with her duties in town.

"My dear, you will be a fright!" she said. "Barbara was all very well for Gillhampton and the rustics, but in London—"

"In London I shall dress myself as I have dressed in the country, and I shall keep Barbara," Miss Halliday replied, with her usual importunate calmness. "If I am not fit to bear comparison with the best of society society will have to do without me. I shall make no change!"

Mrs. Chetwynd shrugged her shoulders, but she was bound to admit that Miss Halliday was right, and that the country lady's maid, in every particular, understood her duties.

Diana was as well dressed as any young lady in society, and with a certain piquancy and quaintness that very few young ladies understood or could imitate.

As to the Frenchwoman, Fantine Desmets by name—everything was found to be correct concerning her.

She had been for some time with an elderly lady, who had nothing to say against her.

She had taken her from rather odd people, but her conduct had been exemplary during the time she had had her. She did not mention that it was only three months, and Mrs. Chetwynd, who was rather busy that morning, and had a good many calls to make, did not waste time asking superfluous questions.

Fantine was engaged, at a liberal rate of wages, to be Miss Vandaleur's own maid.

There was something of triumph in her dark face as she walked away from the house after arranging when she should enter on her duties—not the triumph of a servant who has secured a good situation, but something deeper, as if she had succeeded in a difficult enterprise; and she did not go home to the invalid sister, whom she had put forward as a reason for her being so very anxious to get into a place at once.

But she took a cab as soon as she was out of sight of Sir John Halliday's house—a handsome—and drove straight to a house in Russell-square, and asked for the gentleman who was lodging there.

She sent up her card, and was admitted, the cab being dismissed at once.

A man rose from a lounge-chair in the room which she entered, and greeted her with contemptuous familiarity.

"Well!" he said, "as you have come here,

which I told you not to do, by-the-way, I suppose you have something to tell me?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"I have got the place."

"Ah! own maid to Miss Violet Vandaleur. And she likes you?"

"Yes."

"Then you may be of use? Give me an address to write to, and mind you attend to what I want, or—"

"Or what?"

"I may hint to Sir John Halliday that his ward's French maid is not altogether the sort of person to be trusted in a respectable house."

"You won't do that? Suppose I want to get back to the place I have lost. Suppose—"

"I can't suppose anything of the sort, my dear; the places you have at present will do very well for you. You need never leave it if you play your cards well."

"Do you think I am going to be a slave for ever!" the woman said passionately. "I, your—"

"That will do," was the cool answer, spoken in a hard, freezing tone. "We have had enough of that, if you please. Do as you are bid, and—"

"And win no reward, not a kind word, not a look? It was not so once."

"Bah! That sort of thing can't last for ever," the man said, roughly. "You have had your share of spooning; Fantine; there's an end of it now."

"There shall be!" was all the woman's reply.

And she turned and left him, hailing another cab at the corner of the square, and being driven westward again.

CHAPTER V.

"It won't do, Carrington. Tell us some-thing that we can swallow, dear boy!"

"Swallow it or not as you please, it is true," and Viscount Carrington took his cigar from his mouth and let the smoke float up to the ceiling in hazy rings, "I saw her."

"You saw some one else like her."

"It was herself. I know her too well to be mistaken. There's hardly a girl in London with that wonderfully golden hair. It has gone so completely out of fashion that it is a daring thing to wear it now."

"Daring or not it is magnificent," said another man, sitting in another corner of the room, where he was almost invisibly adding to the general smokiness of the atmosphere, "I don't know when I have seen anything more perfectly lovely in the shape of woman's hair. It looks like entangled sunbeams."

"Oh, Charlton is very far gone," said the first speaker, as all the other occupants of the room laughed at the words. "He fell in love with Miss Vandaleur the very first time he saw her, and has been ready to murder Brunton ever since he knew she was already appropriated."

"I prefer the other beauty myself," Viscount Carrington said, with the air of a connoisseur in female charms. "There's more go in her—what do you say, Trentham?"

"More go, certainly. More temper, too, I should think. Barker's Run will be nothing to the life. Stafford Lennox will lead when she is his wife. She is lovely, certainly—perilously lovely, but more to my taste than the little piece of insanity, her cousin, of whom Carrington has been hatching such a story."

"I didn't hatch it?" said the Viscount, indignantly. "I heard it before I had ocular demonstration of its truth. She must be very unsophisticated or very careless of what the world says to risk what she does."

The place was the smoking-room of the Atlanta Club, the time midnight, and the speakers young men about town, who knew the persons they were talking about right well; and it was Violet Vandaleur that they were dis-

missing, or, rather, that they had just heard something about, which, as Mr. Trentham remarked, took a great deal of swallowing.

The London season was not many weeks old, but the two beautiful cousins had made a great sensation, and the fashionable world were raving about them, as society will rave when it has nothing else to do.

Only their own good sense and Sir John's strict watchfulness saved them from becoming those most despicable creatures—fashionable beauties.

Their portraits had very nearly got into the hands of unscrupulous photographers, but the sale of them was timely stopped; and an action threatened, which put an end to the attempts to see them in the shop-windows side by side with bishops and actors and women, whose faces are their only fortune and whose reputations are nil.

He was old-fashioned, he declared, and had an idea that women should be sought after in their homes, and not in the shop-windows; and yet for all his care and all the surveillance of Mrs. Chetwynd, the chaperon, here was Violet's name being bandied from lip to lip in the smoking-room of one of the fastest clubs in London.

He would almost have had a fit if he could have heard the assertion that Viscount Carrington had made, and in good faith, too—that Violet was playing her lover false, and meeting another man by stealth, like some uneducated servant girl.

"I am not chaffing," the Viscount said, returning to the subject in a pause of the small talk that was going on. "I'm not such a cad as to want to take away any woman's reputation, but it's the simple truth."

"I don't like to think it, for Brunton's sake!" Mr. Trentham remarked, flicking the ash off the end of his cigar. "He's a good fellow! too good to be played with by a false-hearted woman, and she must be that if this horrible thing is true!"

"It is true! I saw her and spoke to her."

"Spoke to her!"

"I did; I was so taken aback that I just said 'Good evening, Miss Vandaleur.' I suppose I ought to have pretended I didn't see her, but I came right upon her all at once."

"In Kensington-gardens you said, didn't you?"

"In Kensington-gardens, not a stone's throw from Sir John's house. She had the dress on she wore at Hurlingham the other morning. It was rather a particular-looking dress, and I think it caught my eye before I knew who I was looking at. It was complete, hat and all; and her hair in that marguerite style that she affects generally."

"You must have been looking pretty closely at her to see all that, dear boy!" the young man his companion had called Charlton remarked; and Viscount Carrington said, "I suppose I was. Things strike one sometimes very forcibly, and I think all that struck me."

"And you spoke to her?"

"Just what I have told you; no more."

"And she spoke to you?"

"Well, yes; she did. She nodded and said 'good evening.' I think she was terribly frightened at the sight of me, and yet she had not chosen any particularly retired place for her assignation."

"I don't like to hear that word in connection with any young girl, Carrington!" Mr. Trentham said.

"I can't help thinking that the whole business was a blunder, or that if you really did see Miss Vandaleur—"

"I really did see her!"

"Then that she had some business with the person, whoever it was, that would explain it all to anyone who had any business with her affairs."

"Which I have not. I sit corrected!" the Viscount said. "Look here, Trentham, I should not have spoken of this thing if I had not heard of it before. The thing is town talk. I suspect almost everybody knows it, except Brunton himself. I could name more

than one man who has seen her with the same person before."

"The person, as you call him, is a end, whoever he is!" Mr. Trentham remarked. "I believe Violet Vandaleur to be an innocent girl, and I hope I don't know the man who is trying to lead her wrong."

"You know him! I don't know that I need make any secret of his name. It is her cousin, Arthur Vandaleur!"

"The greatest scamp unhung! If Brunton knew—"

"He'd break his neck; and serve him right!" Mr. Charlton exclaimed. "I think with you, Trentham, it is all a hideous mistake. I am sure Miss Vandaleur—"

The name died on his lips as the door opened, and the young lady's affianced husband entered the room.

Darcie Brunton was an honorary member of the Atalanta, though he was not often there. Accident took him there on this particular evening, or rather morning, for midnight had struck when he arrived, just in time to hear the name of his betrothed on the lips of the careless coteries in the smoking-room.

"Who is taking Miss Vandaleur's name in vain?" he asked. "If it is any scandal, whoever spoke it will have to answer to me!"

He spoke lightly, to all appearance, and the young Viscount was silent, leaving Mr. Trentham to answer, which he did readily enough.

"We were only on the gossip, my boy. A good many ladies have been under discussion. We were rude enough to be admiring Miss Vandaleur's 'threads of living gold,' as some poet fellow says, and to think her plucky for venturing to wear them now that bronze is all the fashion."

"Was that all?"

"That was all, and it was too much for good manners; but how could we tell that you were at the door?"

"I have only been there long enough to hear my—Miss Vandaleur's name, and to wonder what you were all doing with it."

"Nothing more than I have told you. Something too much, after all. A lady's name should be sacred in a club. But we are all friends of yours and hers, Brunton, or it would not have cropped up, I hope."

He spoke lightly, but there was a strained manner about him that did not escape the quick eye of Darcie Brunton, and somehow a silence seemed to fall on the rest of the party. One by one the men discovered that it was late and went away, leaving Trentham and the young officer alone.

"Going my way?" asked Darcie Brunton, as they also turned from the club door.

"I think not. I am going across the park; it is the nearest for me."

"I'll stroll with you. I don't feel inclined for home yet awhile."

"As you will!"

The response was not very inviting, and Darcie Brunton looked at his friend with a darkened face.

"You don't want me, Trentham, because you don't want to be questioned," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Just that! There was more in what you fellows were talking about than you told me. Be honest with me, Trentham, and tell me what it was those fellows were saying."

"What they were saying! You know what club-room gossip is as well as I do. What do we talk about in the smoke-room? As I said, it was very foolish and very rude to mention any lady's name there, but—"

"Don't trifle with me, for Heaven's sake!" Captain Brunton rejoined, earnestly. "You don't know what this means to me. I come from—well, from a chaos of doubts and suspicions, and the first word I hear in yonder room is the name of the woman I love something slightly spoken by a club-room coteries. Trentham, if you have one spark of feeling or honour in you you will tell me, whom it most concerns, what those men were saying."

"Just this—the truth is best, Brunton, for it is the most harmless in the long run. Every word that passed in that room to night amounted to this:—that Carrington saw Miss Vandaleur talking to her cousin in Kensington Gardens one evening—on my honour there was nothing more. We were commenting on Arthur Vandaleur's character, which he has contrived to conceal from Sir John, I imagine, or he would never have invited him to the Sycamores!"

"Thank you!" said Captain Brunton, huskily. "If that was all you have not heard the half that is town talk, I am told. Other men are not so delicate as you are, and express their sentiments more openly. Good-night, Trentham, you are a lucky fellow!"

"As how?"

"You have not pinned your faith on a woman's truth and honour!"

He had slipped away in the darkness and was gone before his companion knew that he had left him. Mr. Trentham uttered a low whistle as he stood looking after him in the direction he had taken.

"Then Carrington was not 'romancing,' he said to himself; and there is a screw loose—who'd have thought it? But there, these innocent-looking baby angels do manage to turn out something else very often. I could have staked my life on that girl's purity and truth. Whatever can she see in a lout like Arthur Vandaleur when she has Brunton at her feet. Half the women in London would be proud to marry him, and this chit isn't satisfied with her good fortune, but she must go and imperil it. There will be a nice kind of row, I suspect, when the explosion comes, and I wouldn't give much for Mr. Vandaleur's peace of mind if Brunton goes near him now!"

Arthur Vandaleur was dawdling over his breakfast the next morning, skimming his daily papers, and leisurely eating and drinking of the very best—for he was a luxurious young gentleman, and liked to live well—when two letters were brought to him.

"Another of them!" he said, with a wicked smile, as he tore open a dainty-looking epistle, redolent of some subtle perfume that seemed to speak, as some things do, of the writer of the letter, and to be a part of her individuality. He was very careful not to tear the pretty monogram on the envelope; and he looked at the contents with much satisfaction.

"Women do go the whole hog when they begin!" he said to himself, with a sneer. "My pretty little cousin is no exception to the rule; the letter was explicit enough."

"To-night, if I can get out—and I will—under the great elm; the usual time and signal."

There was no signature, only a twisted monogram, like the one on the paper, neatly made with a pen, but the handwriting was Violet Vandaleur's, and the perfume one that she always affected.

"I'll be there, my dear!" he muttered, and tossed the letter on to a side-table. "I wouldn't disappoint little Violet for the world. She isn't always able to get away; and these stealthy meetings are rather an excitement. I feel as if I was playing at love-making again—it's a new sensation!"

There was a double knock at the street-door as he opened the other letter, and read that Captain Brunton would be glad of a few minutes' conversation with him. He laughed aloud this time, and crumpled the paper in his hand, cruel hand.

"So," he exclaimed, "the thing is blown; is it? I shall be very happy to see Captain Brunton, and I think I have the best of it. Come in!"

The door opened, and the man he had wronged so deeply appeared on the threshold.

CHAPTER VI.

THE two men faced each other for a moment without speaking, and then Arthur Vandaleur asked earnestly what had procured him the honour of the visit? Darcie Brunton

was very pale but quite calm, though he would have liked to take the man opposite to him by the throat and strangled him then and there. He hardly believed what he had heard—he could not believe it. Violet was so young, so innocent, that it was impossible to associate her with anything mean or false; and the story that had come to him was, that she had played him false; that she was, meeting her cousin night after night when he, her lover, was elsewhere, and corresponding with him in lover-like fashion.

Part of this intelligence had come to him much as it had come to Mr. Trentham and the men at the club, and part in a fashion that he felt disposed to ignore—through an anonymous letter that had reached him. He could not find out how, for it had lain on his table when he went home to his rooms in the evening after a drive with Violet and her cousin, and no one in the place could tell how it had been placed there.

But for the horrible corroboration that had come from other quarters he would have torn it up and thrown it behind the fire or into the waste-paper basket; but it bade him ask the gentleman himself if he were not satisfied, or the lady; and he had hidden his pain from Violet and let her prattle to him as usual with all her seeming innocence in her sweet eyes, and had come straight to the person most concerned to see if the truth could be got at from him.

"I have a question to ask you, Mr. Vandaleur," he said, quietly, though his heart was beating with fearful rapidity and almost choking his utterance. "It is of vital importance to me or I should not have intruded on you at this hour, or any other."

"I am at your service," Arthur Vandaleur said, "pray be seated."

"Thank you, I prefer to stand. Is this letter true?"

He laid the paper on the table, and Arthur Vandaleur took it up and read it, keeping his face turned away from his visitor so that he should not see the expression in his eyes.

"You had better ask the lady in question," he said; "it seems to me it is for her to tell you."

"I wish to know if it is true from you, who have come between us—who, if this thing does not lie, have tempted her to do things that no modest girl would do—who have—"

"Stop, if you please, Captain Brunton; you may say things that you will regret afterwards. We will put the matter of 'temptation,' as you call it, on one side. I am sorry you have come to me about this matter, but if you must be answered, do you know your—I mean Miss Vandaleur's handwriting?"

"As well as I know my own!"

"Under the circumstances, I will do what no gentleman should—let you see a specimen or two. The letter you have just shown me is true for the most part; these anonymous writers always make the most of things. I have met my cousin now and then, and as this person says (how much time he or she must have had on hand to be able to watch us to be sure!) in what you would call secret; how were we to manage to meet otherwise?"

"Stop!" almost shouted Darcie Brunton. "Stop! or I shall—"

"Murder me?" Well, two can play at that game. Don't try it, please, or you might stand a chance of being killed yourself; wait until you have seen what I promised to show you. It may be good for your belief in your own powers of fascination to see how little of 'temptation' there has been in this business."

It was a wonder that Darcie Brunton did not strike him down where he sat—did not choke the life out of his lying lips before he could say another word in Violet's disfavour; but he had come resolved to be calm, whether he was met with insult or anger, and he set his lips and said never a word, while Arthur Vandaleur sought amongst a heap of papers and letters and selected several.

"I need not confine myself to only one

"specimen," he said, carelessly. "I could show you a dozen, but these will suffice."

Darcie Brunton took what was handed to him in his hand, and looked at the notes with a dazed expression in his eyes and a feeling at his heart as if the world were slipping away from him altogether. The room seemed to swim round with him, and he staggered and felt as if he must fall.

"I must accept your invitation and sit down," he said, in a voice that he hardly recognized as his own—it was so hollow and husky. "A man does not get such a knock-down blow often; and this is a severe one."

"I am sorry it should have come to you here—perhaps, some other time—"

"A man does not prepare for an operation and lay himself on the table to say 'some other time,'" Darcie Brunton said, calmly. "So these are the evidences of the truth of the story that I hear is going the round of the clubs, are they? If these are true—"

"Of that you must be the best judge; you have known my cousin's handwriting longer than I have—at any rate, since she was old enough to manage her own correspondence. I have seen specimens of girlish penmanship said to be hers, but doubtful; they came to me professedly from her, and—"

"Don't say any more—don't speak to me! Have you no more sense than to provoke a desperate man?" Captain Brunton, said hoarsely. "Let me look at the things in silence."

Violet's handwriting! not a doubt of it. Her paper and envelopes, that it was her fancy to have made for her—her fanciful monogram of a bunch of violets twisted into her initials; her signature traced from it in pen and ink, and as he fondly believed, only used to him. All were there to tell him the horrible truth that he was betrayed and forsaken even while the woman he loved—would always love, he told himself, while his life lasted—was making him believe that her love was as true as his own—was looking into his face with eyes that seemed all purity and innocence, and returning his kisses with rosy lips that were as false as the lips of Judas when he betrayed his Lord.

It was hard to believe what he read, and yet the words and familiar handwriting were there; loving words, some of them addressed to the man who sat there, looking at him in triumphant mockery as it seemed. Not one note, nor two, nor three; but many enough to show him that the misery that was dawning upon him had been in preparation ever since Sir John Halliday had come to London with his family; perhaps ever since Arthur Vandaleur had made his appearance at the Symmores.

"Well!" that gentleman said presently. "Are you satisfied, or convinced I should say? Of course it is poor satisfaction to a man to know that he is set aside for some one else. I am rather glad it has come to your knowledge though. Miss Vandaleur—Poor little Vi—will be pleased to think the explosion is all over, and—"

"I will wish you a good morning, Mr. Vandaleur," Darcie Brunton said, rising. "There need be no further communication between us. I congratulate you on your success with the young lady, and can only hope that when you think yourself most sure of her you may not find yourself supplanted in turn."

"I'll risk that!" was all the answer Arthur Vandaleur made to this speech, and he rang the bell for the servant to open the door to the Captain, who was already striding downstairs as if the atmosphere of the house stifled him.

"How will he take it now? What will he do?" said the gentleman he had left behind as the street door shut after him. "Will he make a fuss and blazon the affair all over London? If he does—why, then I must. No, I don't think he is that sort of man; I think he will keep it to himself, and let pretty Violet drop like a hot coal. We shall see."

He did see—not that day, nor the next;

but the one following that he read in the even-papers.

An important addition to the new African expedition has been secured in the person of Captain Darcie Brunton, already well known to the public as one of the heroes of the spirited defence of Barker's Run. The gallant captain's determination to join the brave band of explorers was not made known till the very last moment, and is reported to have been brought about by domestic events of a very painful nature. Captain Brunton started for Southampton this afternoon, and will sail from that place with the rest of the party to-morrow morning early.

"So," Arthur Vandaleur said, as he read the paragraph, "he is gone, is he? and has left the field open for better men—for me, perhaps—who knows? What has he done or said, I wonder?"

Not much, as it seemed, for there was no report of anything particular having happened, but yet his work had been well done. Violet had received a mysterious package—a stiff envelope of brown paper. Several letters and two or three small parcels fell out of it, as she opened it with trembling hands, and a note in a sealed envelope. She stared at the scattered papers and the little parcels, and had no need to open them. Darcie Brunton had sent her back her letters and the little presents she had given him—every one! She understood it. The speechless things had a voice, and told her she was forsaken! Why, it mattered little. There was the fact; and, with a gasp that was like a moan, she fell forward at her cousin's feet. They raised her, and laid her on the sofa, and looked at one another in bewilderment.

"No—don't call any one," Stafford Lennox said. "She will come to herself all too soon. What does it mean?"

"She has the solution here," Diana said. "Shall I open it?"

"Yes. We may do something if there is time. I have heard a hint or two that I think I understand now. He has heard the same, doubtless. I wish I had spoken; I wish I had warned you and her; but I hate scandal, and I looked on this as nothing more. What is in that note?"

What was in it? The anonymous letter that had worked such mischief, and a few broken lines from Darcie Brunton:—

"I have seen Arthur Vandaleur, and have heard the truth from him. Heaven forgive you for my broken life, and make yours endurable! We shall never meet again!"

"I must find him," Colonel Lennox said. "There's an awful blunder somewhere, and it must be set right! Take care of her, my darling, and get her to talk to you, if you can! She may have given colour to some of it by something foolish she has done. It will all be set straight in a few days."

And so the party to Richmond never came off, and Diana was left to take her hapless cousin to her room while her lover set off post haste to seek Darcie Brunton, and bring him to reason.

CHAPTER VII.

STAFFORD LENNOX could hear nothing of Captain Brunton at his club or his chambers. At the latter place his man said that he had orders to pack everything away and seal up his master's things. He was going away, but where he had not told him. He was in great trouble, for it was evident the captain did not intend to take him with him, and he was much attached to his master.

"I am afraid something has happened, sir," he said. "The captain was not in bed all night. He came home yesterday morning like a man out of his senses, and all the afternoon he was shut up in his room. I was afraid of what might happen, for I saw that he had some trouble on his mind, and I made bold to ask if there was anything that I could help in."

"And what did he say?" asked Colonel Lennox. "Did he tell you anything?"

"Nothing, sir; he only said that no one could help him. He was going to enter on a new enterprise, or something of that sort. Indeed, I don't think he very well knew what he was saying, and all night he was walking about like a madman. I fancy his leave has been shortened, and he has had to go back to the regiment again, somehow. He said I was to say he was out of town if any one came for him; and he took nothing with him but his overcoat."

"And didn't say when he should be home again?"

"No, sir."

"And you are not to join him anywhere?"

"No, sir."

"I must see him," Colonel Lennox said. "There is almost life and death depending on it!"

"I'm afraid for him, sir," the man said. "I oughtn't to speak perhaps; but I can't help fancying that there is something about Miss Vandaleur in it! I saw him tear something he had from her one day—only a little programme or something of that sort—into a thousand shreds, and stamp on it like a man beside himself! There's some one means that young lady mischief! If he hadn't gone off so suddenly, and I could have found an opportunity, I should have made bold to tell him something."

"What is it, Trent?" the Colonel said. "You have been a faithful servant to Captain Brunton, and can keep your own counsel; and I must know anything that will help me to find him, and stop him from doing anything desperate! It has to do with Miss Vandaleur. Some one has, as you say, worked mischief. I know nothing at present, except that he is gone, and the young lady very ill. Tell me all you know."

"It isn't much, sir," Trent replied; "only this much: there was a letter brought here to my master two days ago. No one knew how at the time; but I have heard since it was given to the housekeeper's little girl in the street by a woman. I know it was something about Miss Vandaleur, for I heard what he let drop in the first anger and grief of it. He put it in his pocket, but he left the envelope; and the housekeeper knows the writing!"

"Whose is it?"

"A female Beelzebub, that's what she is, sir! a woman with as many names as faces, and all of them wicked! She hasn't a notion where she is now; but she is sure of the handwriting. She showed me some more of it."

"It is a tangled skein at present, Trent," Colonel Lennox said. "I don't know what has been said about Miss Vandaleur. I have only heard vague hints at something which I am quite sure is not true. If there is any plot against her happiness and your master's we will soon trace it. But the first thing is to bring him back, and prevent him doing anything desperate or absurd!"

It was easy to plan but not so easy to execute. The faithful Trent saw no more of his master. Darcie Brunton knew how far he could trust him, and the evening's post brought tidings of the missing man—tidings that fell like a leaden weight on their hearts. Darcie Brunton was gone, and it would be weeks, perhaps, before they could communicate with him!

All the negotiations about the African business had been conducted with secrecy and despatch. Nothing is difficult when there is a full purse; and he was away on the sea before any one knew that he intended to leave England.

Colonel Lennox told Trent he would call again in a few hours, and in the meantime if Captain Brunton returned he was to let him know at once. He should be at Sir John Halliday's in the course of a couple of hours and should remain there for some time, and then he went straight to Arthur Vandaleur's rooms and asked for him. He was denied, and was told that Mr. Vandaleur was out of

town and not likely to return for some time, the fact being that that gentleman had seen his arrival and issued his orders, having no fancy for an encounter with any one connected with his cousin just at present.

Foiled every way the colonel returned not a little dispirited to Diana and found her weeping bitterly. Violet was very ill, and nothing could be gathered from her. She rambled in the wildest manner, and accused herself of all sorts of things which Diana was sure were only imagination. Mrs. Chetwynd and her maid were with her, and they had sent for the doctor. They were afraid for her reason.

The doctor came and shook his head and talked about mental shocks, and prescribed a sedative, and prophesied Violet would be better soon, and went his way. And the dreary evening and night wore away, and it seemed as if the unhappy girl would go into a brain-fever, till Diana took her in hand and insisted on remaining with her, and turning out the maid.

In answer to her question, when they were alone, Violet said Arthur had written to ask her to see him alone. He had something to tell her, and some letters that had been her father's to give her. He had a reason, he said, for not calling at the house, and he would not detain her long, if she would come.

He would rather she did not mention him to anyone in the place. He had given offence for which he was very sorry, and he would rather keep out of Sir John's ken till it was forgotten.

And she had met him in the gardens once, and he had given her the letters, and asked her for the loan of some money, which she had given him, and that was all; she had never seen him since—never wanted to. And how could Darcie take offence at such a trifle? What did he fancy she had done?

"It is an awful mistake, Vi!" Diana said, "or a wicked plot he says in his note to you. Stafford and I opened it to find out, if we could, what was wrong. That he has seen Arthur Vandaleur, and—"

"But Arthur could only tell him what I have told you!" Violet said, in bewilderment. "It was only that once—not enough to come between us like this. I should have told Darcie all about it, but my cousin begged me not to. Oh! what shall I do? What shall I do? He is gone, and I shall never see him again!"

"Yes, you shall, dear!" Diana said, confidently. "You shall see him and Arthur Vandaleur, too, and all will be cleared up. Stafford will set everything right for you. There is nothing he cannot do, and Darcie will listen to him, and tell him what he has been fancying; so go to sleep, there's a good girl, and be quite ready to talk to Captain Brunton when he comes back, as he will."

When he comes back! Alas! there were miles of blue water between Captain Brunton and the shore when Diana spoke the hopeful words, and all that they saw or heard of him was two notes—one to Trent telling him what to do with the things, and enclosing a bank note to a large amount in lieu of notice to leave, and another to Stafford Lennox, saying what he had done, and expressing a vague hope that he might never come back alive.

"He is mad!" that gentleman said, when he had read the letter.

"Never mind Di, keep up that poor child's heart, if you can; we will fathom this mystery, for there is one, and a letter will reach Brunton at Zanzibar. They will make a longish stay there to gather their forces and provisions and pick their guides. It is only a question of waiting; she will have him back thoroughly ashamed of himself I should hope, in three months, if she is patient."

"I wish I could think so," Diana said; "I cannot understand it."

CHAPTER VIII.

A month passed away—two—three—and no answer came to the loving appeal Violet sent to the man who had judged her so hardly; and

the time that had been fixed for the double marriage was drawing near, and there would be no bridegroom for Violet Vandaleur.

Sir John was truly sorry for the forlorn girl, and thoroughly believed in the truth of her story. He had tried to find his nephew and get the other side of the story from him; but Arthur Vandaleur seemed to have vanished from every place where he had been known.

There was no doubt that Violet's unhappiness had been a planned affair, and Diana one day came upon ample proof that the Frenchwoman, who had been the poor girl's maid, had been a confederate in the wicked business.

It was she who had personated Violet in the meetings the world had seen and commented on—notably the one surprised by Viscount Carrington. No wonder she was discomfited and confused when the young gentleman spoke to her.

The world did not know of her relations with Arthur Vandaleur, and his power to make her do what he chose.

One day at breakfast as Violet entered the room, Sir John broke the seal of a letter which he perused with a startled look on his face.

"It concerns you, my dear," he said, when he had finished it.

"Concerns me, uncle!"

"Yes, dear."

"How?"

"Arthur Vandaleur is dying, Violet."

"Dying! oh, where?"

"In a back street in Antwerp, child. This letter is from a sister of charity or something of that sort, I suspect, who is attending on him. He has met with a bad accident, and wants to see me and you."

"To see me! Oh, what for?"

"I don't know; I can only guess. Will you come?"

"Oh, yes."

In two hours from the time of the receipt of the letter Sir John and his niece were on their road to Antwerp, meeting Arthur Vandaleur's father at Harwich, en route for the same place as themselves. He was in great distress as a father must be who is going to see the end of the life of a son on whom he had built his hopes—the only one of his children who was worth anything, he had been used to say, when he was a child. But how worthless he had turned out!

Together they went to the miserable place where the dying man lay—for dying Arthur Vandaleur certainly was—past all human aid. There had been a slight accident on the railway, and he had been hurt—slightly as was at first supposed; to death it turned out.

He confessed everything to them, for there was a germ of blood in him after all, or he would not have sent for the girl he had wronged to hear the truth from his own lips.

The next day they left Antwerp again. There was no need for them to stay; Equire Vandaleur's second son was the heir now, and Arthur's faults and follies were at an end for ever.

"It will all come right now, my dear," Sir John said to his niece, as they entered the railway carriage that was to take them on the first stage of their journey home. "Only have patience. We will have Darcie back, if I go to Africa myself to fetch him!"

Violet smiled; there was something like hope in her heart now, though it was very faint, and her uncle put a newspaper in her and—an English one, that he had purchased at the station.

"It's yesterday's," he said. "But it will be all news to us;" and he buried himself behind a sheet of the *Times*, while Violet turned over the *Telegraph*, her thoughts wandering far away to Africa and Darcie Brunton.

"Violet my dear, give me that paper, this will be pleasanter reading for you," Sir John said presently, and his face was full of horror and pity as he spoke. "But his words fell on unheeding ears—Violet had fallen back in her place in a dead faint. She lay there white and rigid, and it almost seemed to her uncle

as if it would be better she should die—for the paper contained the miserable story of the end of the expedition. It had been set upon, and almost totally destroyed. The names of the killed were given, and Darcie Brunton's headed the list.

Twelve months were gone by, Diana had been quietly married, and the infant heir of the house of Lennox was being spoiled to his heart's content at the Sycamores. When Violet made her appearance there on a short visit she was not the bright fairy-like Vi of former days. Slight and *spirituelle* she could not help being—and lovely she would be, to her life's end; but never more the bright, happy girl who had never known a sorrow from the hour of her going to her uncle's house to live.

One day she and another sister named Barbara, were called to an hotel in the city, where a gentleman was lying very ill. He had only just arrived there, and had not been able to give any orders or even his name, and the proprietor had sent to them having had a nurse from their house in his establishment before." Sister Barbara was there already, but could not undertake the whole duty, and Violet packed her little bag and set forth to assist her.

"I am afraid it is only to see him die, miss!" the waiter said, who took her up to the room door. "And we can't find out anything about him—whether he has any friends or not. He was getting change at the bar when he just fell down as if all the life was going out of him, and there he has lain ever since."

Sister Barbara had tried everything that she could think of, and the doctors had done all they could, and were coming again before night—but it was very hopeless. "Sister Ernestine tried a course of treatment of her own, which very much astonished and scandalized the more staid and elderly lady who was her colleague. She bent over the wan wasted figure in the bed, and looked at the hollow cheeks with a curious stare of wonderment and fear. Then she lifted the heavy head and kissed it passionately. "He shall not die! he shall not die!" she gasped, and then went into hysterics herself.

Sister Barbara was wise in her generation, and she did not ring the bell nor make a fuss, but attended to her young assistant, and brought her back to her senses again, like a sensible woman as she was.

In two hours from that time Sir John came into the room where his daughter sat with her husband, and the juvenile tyrant of their united lives, and put a telegram on the table before them.

"I am afraid poor Vi has gone out of her mind," he said. "Read this!"

They read it wondering. "Come to me—all of you. I have found him—he is not dead."

It was dated from a city hotel, and they guessed how it was. The insensible patient was Darcie Brunton, if indeed Violet had not made some terrible mistake. As soon as a fast train could take them Sir John and Colonel Lennox were with Violet in the sitting-room allotted to the two nurses, listening to her broken words of thankfulness and joy. He was awake, and he knew her, and he was so far restored as to be able to ask for his friends. But they had no knowledge yet how he came to be there, or how he had escaped the fate of his companions.

The knowledge came in due course. But for many a long day Darcie Brunton hovered between life and death, tended with watchful care by his wife that was to have been, and her coadjutor. And then there came a day when he was able to be moved into the country, and the Sycamores opened its doors to him, and he was once more amongst the flowers and waving trees of an English country home. Violet was not with him then—she had gone back to the home, her feelings strangely mingled. She had helped to nurse him back to life; while he was fighting with death he

seemed her own. Now that the fear was over the shadow of Arthur Vandaleur rose up between them; and stopped the loving words and caresses that were in her heart to give.

She knew now how it was that he had not received her letter. The unlucky expedition had remained but a very little while in Zanzibar, pushing on in fear of hostile pursuit; and the missive had doubtless travelled after them as far as possible and got lost, as many others had done. That he escaped from the massacre was due to the fact that he was left for dead and fell in with a friendly native afterwards. But it had been a year before he could get back to civilization; and it was only through the help of different Consuls in the various places he had to pass that he was able to reach England.

He had no idea of concealing his identity longer than the next day or so at farthest, when he was stricken down with the illness which would, in all probability, have proved fatal but for the timely care and good nursing bestowed upon him by Sister Ernestine and her friend. It was from Diana's lips that he learned all that had passed during his absence, and how precipitate he had been in going away. And it was she who brought Violet to him when his despondency seemed in a fair way to lay him once more on a bed of sickness, and bade them be thankful that they had found each other, and not "fly in the face of Providence."

Society has never been able to settle satisfactorily the real facts of the delay in the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Branton—not exactly why the gentleman went away and the lady turned Sister of Mercy; but as Sir John and his daughter both say, it is no business of anyone's but the persons most interested, and they are away enjoying their honeymoon; and out of hearing of all the twaddle that is talked. And when they come back, the world will receive them with open arms, and will have found it expedient to forget that there was ever anything mysterious about it; and the gossip regarding Arthur Vandaleur's lost venture, which Darcie Branton's sudden return aroused in all its freshness, will have died out for ever.

[THE END.]

FACTS.

I don't know where that boy got his bad temper—not from me, I am sure," said the husband. "No, my dear, for I don't perceive you have lost any."

A PARSON once prefaced his sermon with, "My friends, let us say a few words before we begin." This is about equal to the man who took a short nap before he went to sleep.

SOMEBODY tried to excuse a liar to Dr. Johnson, saying, "You must not believe more than half what he says." "Ay," replied the doctor, "but which half?"

THEY said to the father of one of the prize-winners at college: "So your son has earned his spurs." "Yes," replied the practical old man, "and now he's got to earn his boots."

A QUACK, on feeling a patient's pulse, said: "I suppose you consider me a humbug?" to which the patient responded: "How odd it is that you can tell a person's thoughts so accurately by just feeling his pulse."

CURIOUS CONFESSION.—A youth has been paying his addresses to a young lady, under the impression that she was wealthy. Finally she told him promptly that the bank had failed, and that she was penniless, after which his attentions slackened up. A few days ago she said to him: "Dear George, it seems to me that since you found out I am only a poor girl you have ceased to love me." "You don't say so!" rejoined the candid youth; "do you know that the very same idea has occurred to me?"

"LENNY," said his maiden aunt, "you should eat the barley that is in your soup, or you'll never get a man." Lenny looking up innocently inquired, "Is that what you eat it for, aunty?"

A CORRESPONDENT wants to know why a young widow is more fascinating than a young girl. We don't know much about the subject, but should suppose that it is because the widow appreciates the value of time.

Said the night watchman, when about dusk he was invited to drink a cup of coffee: "No, thank you; coffee keeps me awake all night." And then he saw his blunder, and looked very embarrassed, and tried to explain it. But it was no use.

A NEATLY girl told her beau that she was a mind-reader. "You don't say so!" he exclaimed. "Yes," she said—"you have it in your mind to ask me to be your wife, but you are just a little scared at the idea." Their wedding-cards are out.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF A PROVINCIAL.—The party had been harvesting, and were now returning. "Jock," said the worthy's intended, "did 'ee kiss o' in the tunnel?" "No, lassie, ah didna." Short pause, and then unconcernedly—"Oa, 'twas soon 'oon aise than!"

A BOY home from school, after paying his usual holiday visit to the dentist, thus described how he had a tooth drawn—"The dentist collared me, pulled like wild horses, and just before my head came off the tooth dropped out."

A WITNESS was in the box in an illegal liquor sale case. The counsel was trying to find out in what kind of glass the liquor was handed to the witness, and at last exclaimed, "What kind of a looking glass was it?" "Begorra, sor, it was not a looking glass at all; it was a tumbler."

"So you enjoyed your visit to the menagerie, did you?" inquired a young man of his adored one's little sister. "Oh, yes. And, do you know, we saw a camel there that scratched its mouth and eyes around awfully, and sister said it looked exactly as you do when you are reciting poetry at the evening parties."

Two little girls met in the street, the other day, and one said to the other, "I've put all my dolls into deep mourning, and it's so becoming to them. Come over and see them." "What did you do that for?" "Oh, we had a calamity. Our old dog got killed, and there didn't anybody care but me and them. We've just cried ourselves out." Then the other little girl said, in slow, deliberate tones, "May Wilson, ain't you lucky, though? There's always something happening to you!"

A GENTLEMAN, who had been in Austin only three days, but who had been paying attention to a prominent Austin belle, wanted to propose, but was afraid he would be thought too hasty. He delicately broached the subject as follows: "If I were to speak to you of marriage, after having only made your acquaintance three days ago, what would you say to it?" "Well, I should say never put off till to-morrow that which you should have done the day before yesterday."

As Sheridan Knowles was walking one day with a brother dramatist, he was accosted by a gentleman in these terms: "You're a pretty fellow, Knowles! After fixing your own day and hour to dine with us, you never made your appearance." "I couldn't help it, upon my honour," replied Knowles. "How are you all at home?" "Oh, quite well, thank you. But, come now, will you name another day and keep your word?" "I will—sure I will." "Well, what day—shall we say Thursday next?" "Yes, Thursday be it." "At six?" "At six; I'll be there punctually. My love to 'em all." The friend departed, and Knowles, re-linking his arm with that of Bernard, said: "Who's that chap?" not having the least idea of the name or residence of the man he had promised to dine with, or the interesting family to whom he had sent his love.

"HAVE I not offered you every advantage?" said a doting father to his son. "Oh, yes," replied the youth; "but I could not think of taking advantage of my father."

It is supposed that the reason why the aesthetes admire the stork so enthusiastically is because it can stand on one leg for hours at a stretch, and look as though it never had an idea in its head.

"Mrs. Mirrie," said a visitor, "Emma has your features, but I think she has got her father's hair." "Oh, now, I see," said the dear little Emma; "it's because I have father's hair that he has to wear a wig."

"Poon fellow! he died in poverty," said a man of a person lately deceased. "That isn't anything!" exclaimed a seedy bystander. "Dying in poverty is no hardship; it's living in poverty that puts the thumb-screws on a fellow."

A few days ago, as two young men were passing Trinity Church, they were stopped by a little boy, who was sitting on the outside of the railing, with, "Young gentlemen, please help the blind?" "How do you know we are young gentlemen?" said one, "if you are blind?" "Oh!" said the boy, "I meant deaf and dumb!"

"How did you come to break off your engagement with Miss Snowball?" asked Uncle Moses of a darkey. "In de first place, Uncle Moses, she wasn't berry young, and she didn't hab no money, and jawed like de debbel; and secondly, she wouldn't hab me, and went and married another niggah, so I tuk de advice ob my frens and jess dropped her."

An excellent story is told of a British soldier in Egypt. His colonel, observing him one morning wending his way to camp with a fine Egyptian rooster in his arms, halted him to know if he had been stealing chickens. "No, colonel," was the reply; "I just saw the old fellow sitting on the fence, and I ordered him to caw for old England, and he wouldn't, when I confiscated him for a rebel."

Only two days ago our barber solemnly assured us that he thought a great deal of Rev. Joseph Cook and loved to converse with him, as he could understand him. Then we got out of the chair and said, "This thing is all wrong. If you can understand Joseph Cook, it's not for you to shave us. Get up in the chair, and we will shave you."—Boston Post.

"I HATE to see a woman with rings in her ears," exclaimed the good deacon; "they ain't natural. If it was intended for woman to wear them she would have been born with holes in her ears. The first woman didn't wear rings, I'll be bound." "No," remarked the quiet little man in the corner, "nor nothing else." The discussion was adjourned without delay.

A TALENTED ANCESTOR.—Von Kalkbrenner, the noted pianist; used to pride himself on the particle which preceded his name, and paraded it on every occasion. "Do you know," he once said to an acquaintance, "that the nobility of my family dates from the Crusades? One of my ancestors accompanied the Emperor Barbarossa—" "On the piano?" asked the other.

THE French actor Brasseur could disguise his identity completely. At a dinner given to his company by the manager he made a bet with his comrade, L'Herrier, that he could disguise himself so completely that not even he could detect him. He left the room. Soon after coffee was brought in by a waiter who was every inch a Gascon—black whiskers, bushy eyebrows, curly hair, and a bronze complexion. He was the very personification of awkwardness, upsetting the things, spilling the coffee, and at last putting the sugar into L'Herrier's cup with his fingers. The latter sprang and dragged the rustic waiter to the door. With one gesture, however, away went wig and whiskers, and there stood Brasseur, exclaiming, "Sold, old man; you have lost your bet."

SOCIETY.

THE young Princes of Wales are still studying at Lausanne, and in their recreation hours play a great deal at lawn-tennis; they also ride as much as possible, that exercise having been recommended for Prince Albert Victor.

THE crews of the Oxford and Cambridge race will take part, as well as many ladies of the pure Greek type of beauty, in the plays of that nationality, which are to be performed in June next at Cromwell House.

A MEMORIAL ROOM, set apart to contain mementoes and relics of Mr. Garfield, the walls to be covered with framed resolutions and letters of sympathy, is being prepared by Mrs. Garfield.

A MARRIAGE is arranged between Mr. Hugh Northcote, fifth son of Sir Stafford Northcote, and Miss Edith Fish, daughter of Mr. Fish, late American Secretary of State. The bridegroom elect is a partner in the firm of Messrs. Tod, Northcote, and Bowring, of New York.

ROSA BONHEUR has, for some time, been suffering from illness, and no new work may be expected from her pen; but in all probability there will be a loan collection of this great artist's works at the King-street Galleries during the season.

THE Princess Christian was present at the funeral of Mr. Arthur Wellesey (aged seventeen), son of the late Dean of Windsor. General Ponsonby represented the Queen, and deposited at the grave a wreath of immortelles from Her Majesty, similar ones being sent in the names of the Duke of Albany, Princess Beatrice, and Princess Frederica of Hanover.

THE activity of the Royal family, both in matters of business and pleasure, was never better exemplified than at the present moment. For instance, the Prince of Wales will shortly open the new buildings of the City of London College, Moorfields. The Duke of Connaught on the 9th laid the foundation-stone of St. Ann's Church, Bagshot, Surrey, when the ceremonial, which was carried out with Masonic honours, took place in the presence of a large assemblage. In the matter of music especially is this almost restless feeling apparent; for the Duchess of Edinburgh and the Duke and Duchess of Albany, with the King and Queen of the Netherlands, went to the performance of Berlioz's "Faust" by the Royal Albert Hall Choral Society on the 11th—one of the greatest musical treats of the season; and the Duke and Duchess of Albany had, on the previous evening, witnessed the first performance of "Columba" at Drury-lane Theatre.

THE annual ceremony at Madrid of the washing of feet by Royalty recently took place. The ball-room was used for the occasion, one end being fitted up as an altar. The imposing scene was witnessed by ex-Queen Isabella, the Princess of the Asturias, and the Infanta Paz, who was accompanied by her fiancé, the Bavarian Prince, who has since become her husband. The beggars were ranged in two rows, thirteen men and thirteen women, all, as a matter of course, washed for the occasion, and clad not in rags, but in clothes provided at the palace for them, which these vagrants invariably sold directly they were outside the palace. The King and Queen were attended by a courtly train, and after a short service commenced their duties, which were fulfilled by dipping a finger in rosewater, and touching with it the beggars' feet. This being over, each of the thirteen males was led out by a grandee of Spain, and each woman by one of the greatest ladies of the Court. After this fish, pies, fruit, omelettes, &c., were passed through the Queen's hands to the outer world, where they were sold, and the money presented to the above paupers. Gorgeous dresses, velvet trains, diamonds, splendid uniforms, &c., formed a gay and glittering pageant, but absolutely incongruous with the hour and with the Scripture record from whence the ceremony takes its origin.

STATISTICS.

IN the year 1788 there were only 20 sheep in Australia. At the present time there are no fewer than 62,000,000.

THE MARRIAGE AGE IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES.—Austria, 14 years for both sexes; Germany, the man at 18, the woman at 14; Belgium, the man at 18, the woman at 15; Spain, the man at 14, the woman at 12; France, the man at 18, the woman at 15; Greece, the man at 14, the woman at 12; Hungary—Catholics, the man at 14, the woman at 12; Protestants, the man at 18, the woman at 15; Portugal, the man at 14, the woman at 12; Russia, the man at 18, the woman at 16; Saxony, the man at 18, the woman at 16; Switzerland, the man at 14, the woman at 12.

TOBACCO STATISTICS.—Asia produces 31,000 quintals (100lbs. avoirdupois) of tobacco; Alsace-Lorraine, 160,000; Bavaria, 156,000; the Duchy of Baden, 242,000; North Germany, 100,000, of which Prussia furnishes the fourth part; the Low Countries furnish 85,000 quintals; Italy, 93,000; Russia, 180,000; Austria, 1,000,000. In America the Brazils produce 309,000; Cuba, 610,000; North America, 3,400,000. The total quantity produced amounts to 18,000,000 quintals. The annual quantity consumed in Russia, France, and England, is at the rate of 11lb. per inhabitant; in Italy at the rate of 11lb.; in Austria 2½lbs. In the United States and Germany, 3lbs.; in Belgium 4½lbs.; and in Holland, 5½lbs.

GEMS.

CHARITY is a virtue of all times and all places.

WHEN a man speaks the truth you may count pretty surely that he possesses some other virtues.

WHATEVER you win in life you must conquer by your own efforts, and then it is yours, a part of yourself.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

POTATOES FRIED IN RIBBONS.—Cut a slice out of a raw unpeeled potato about an inch thick. Peel off the skin, and then confine to peel till the slice has been converted to a ribbon; it should not be too thin. Tie it in knots or bows, and keep it in cold water till ready to fry. The potatoes must be quickly peeled with a sharp knife, and must go into water as they are peeled. Dry them slightly with a cloth before frying, the fat must be boiling, and when a nice golden colour they are done. Serve hot on a folded napkin.

ASPIDO JELLY.—Dip a string mould into scalding water and rinse it out with cold, pour into it a little savoury jelly, which should be quite bright and clear; let it set slightly, and place in it pieces of cold boiled fish, or slices of hard-boiled egg, or whatever is to be served in it; fill up the mould with the jelly, and let it stand to get cold. When required, just dip the mould in hot water, slightly shake, and turn it out on a dish. Garnish round the dish with alternate slices of lemon and cucumber, fill the centre with parsley.

EGGS DIFFERENT WAYS.—1. Spread a small dish with butter, break in as many eggs as may be required, taking care not to break the yolks. Let the dish be held for a very few minutes over a slow fire, which will suffice to let the whites— they are then done; shake over them a little pepper and salt, and serve immediately. 2. Warm a little butter, and beat it up with two or three eggs in a saucepan, add a little pepper and salt, and keep stirring over the fire till they become slightly brown, and detach themselves from the pan. Serve immediately on a thick slice of hot buttered toast.

MISCELLANEOUS.

IT is the most momentous question a woman is ever called upon to decide, whether the faults of the man she loves will drag her down, or whether she is competent to be his earthly redeemer.

A CHEAP and simple remedy for rheumatism has been found by a Canadian doctor—total abstinence from food. He declares that many cases of acute articular rheumatism have been cured by fasting in from four to eight days, while chronic rheumatism was also alleviated. No medicines whatever were given, but patients might drink cold water or moderate quantities of lemonade. The doctor states that rheumatism is after all only a phase of indigestion, and therefore can be cured by giving complete and continued rest to all the digestive organs.

PRETTY LAMP SHADES.—A very pretty effect for a lamp shade is gained by the use of tissue paper. Either a wire or glass shade may be employed as a foundation. This should be rather small and round. Large rose petals are cut out of pink tissue paper, and these are fastened on the foundation. A tiny plait is made in the base of each petal, and the row at the top of the shade is secured in place first. The second row is so arranged as to conceal where the first row is fastened, and the succeeding ones in the same way. The bottom is finished with moss, the whole giving the effect of a large moss rose.

SHORT-HAIRED SISTERS.—Short hair is again in fashion, and in spite of all that can be or has been said to the contrary, ladies are sacrificing all that remains of their crowning glory which is left from the ravages of bandoline, hot slate pencils and pins that crimp to the Moloch of the present fashion. These short, rippling locks are charming to the last degree on some heads, but to many ladies they are far from becoming, as they give them a masculine appearance not at all prepossessing; and even the pretty, round, rosy-faced girls who turn themselves into bewitching little Cupids by this style of coiffure must remember that they will be obliged to resort to the inevitable Derby hat for a head covering, as any other hat, bonnet, or even the stylish little French toque cannot very well be kept secure without some foundation more solid than ringlets to which they may be fastened.

HOW ANIMALS FORETOLD AN EARTHQUAKE.—An Italian writer on the catastrophe on the Island of Ischia mentions those prognostics of an earthquake which are derived from animals. They were observed in every place where the shocks were such as to be generally perceptible. Some minutes before they were felt, the oxen and cows began to bellow, the sheep and goats bleated, and rushing in confusion one on the other, tried to break the wicker-work of the folds. The dogs howled, the geese and fowls were alarmed and made much noise; the horses which were fastened in the stalls were greatly agitated, leaped up and down and tried to break the halters with which they were attached to the mangers, those on the road stopped suddenly and snorted in a very strange way. The cats were very much frightened, and tried to conceal themselves, or their hair bristled up wildly. Rabbits and moles were seen to leave their holes; birds rose as if scared from the places on which they had alighted; and fish left the bottom of the sea and approached the shores, where at some places great numbers of them were taken. Even ants and reptiles abandoned, in clear daylight, their subterranean holes in great disorder, many hours before the shocks were felt. The dogs, a few minutes before the first shock took place, awoke their sleeping masters by barking and pulling them, as if they wished to warn them of the impending danger, and several persons were thus enabled to save themselves.

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LALLY B.—To ascertain your rights to the property in question it will be absolutely necessary to employ a lawyer. It would be impossible for us to spare the time to find the whereabouts of the heir, or the former owners of the estate, or to consult the various legal authorities necessary for a clear understanding of the subject.

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DORA.—1. To remove the marks of perspiration in clothing, first use a strong solution of soda, and then rinse thoroughly with clean water. 2. Stained wear may be cleaned by making a paste with whiting and alcohol, applying it to the stained articles, and after it has dried rubbing it off with a brush (if rough), or a soft rag, if smooth.

C. L. B. D.—Do not marry without the consent of your parents until you are twenty-one years of age. If you postpone your wedding till that time you will then know the strength of your mutual affection and its constancy. Your parents will by that time have probably withdrawn all objection, as you will have come over to their views.

ESSIE.—1. A card when you are not at home is the same as a personal visit, and it is your duty to return it. The neglect of this would be a great solecism, and your visitor, unless a very intimate friend, would have the privilege of regarding her presence as undesirable. 2. In passing through a door, a lady, even if she is the hostess, always precedes a gentleman. 3. It is not improper for a lady, after frequently meeting a gentleman, to ask him to call upon her; but usually he asks her permission or is brought by a mutual friend.

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Of all the hours of youth, to me
The time that seemed most sweet
Was when, the Sunday service done,
We scattered down the street—
The village street—between its rows
Of poplar, elm, and birch;
The way was pleasant to our feet
When walking home from church.

Upon my father's arm she leaned,
My mother, old and kind;
But pretty Kitty Gray and I
We left them far behind.
How good was I when, for my sake,
She left them in the lurch—
Her other sweethearts, who would fain
Walk home with her from church.
"Tis many a year since then I strolled,
With Kitty for my bride,
As now my daughter walks before
Her lover by her side.
And my old wife and I would ne'er
For sweeter pleasure search
Than walking down the country road
Together home from church.

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STACEY STUCK.—Stacey Stuck, the eminent tenor singer was born at Woolwich in 1831. He displayed, at the early age of fourteen, a great deal of musical talent, and became a clever performer on various instruments, and tolerably well versed in composition. It was at this time he was appointed organist and director of the choir in the church of North Gray in Kent. He first appeared in public as a baritone at Newcastle, in 1850, scoring an immense success. A short while after this, in order to perfect his voice and style, he went to Paris, and after studying there for some time, appeared at Milan in a tenor part, and created a perfect furore. Returning to England in 1857, he was immediately recognised as the best of all English tenors, and since then his career has been one continued success.

F. J. B.—There are various causes of rheumatism, such as sudden changes of temperature, exposure to draughts, sleeping in a damp bed, &c. It may also be hereditary, which, although not showing itself for years, will be suddenly developed by a slight cold. A faulty digestion is also a great cause of this troublesome and painful affliction. The precise nature of the poisonous principle introduced into the blood in such cases is never been satisfactorily determined, various theories being entertained by different physicians. It is generally believed to be what is known as lactic acid. It would be advisable in your case to consult the family physician, who is, no doubt, thoroughly acquainted with any predisposing causes existing in your family. See also Miscellaneous in the present number.

MAURA.—Ink-stains on books, paper, &c., may be removed successfully in a variety of ways. Nearly all the acids will remove spots of ink from paper; but it is necessary to employ such as will not injure its texture. Muratic acid, diluted in five or six times the quantity of water, may be applied with success upon the spot. After a minute or two it must be washed off with clean water. A weak solution of either tartaric, oxalic, or citric acid is attended with the same risk, and may be applied upon the paper without fear of damage. These acids taking out writing-ink can be used for restoring books where the margins have been written upon, without attacking the text. Due care should be exercised in the handling of oxalic acid, as it is a very dangerous poison.

P. D.—The national symbol of England, in the olden time, was the rose; the shamrock, or clover, of Ireland; and the thistle, of Scotland. When England claimed Ireland and Scotland, these three symbols were united on the royal shield of Great Britain, as they were found in the time of Queen Elizabeth. After a victory over France, the symbol that of country was also added, the unicorn wearing a chain, to denote the subjection of France to England. When a new sovereign succeeds to the crown, he has a right to place his own family coat-of-arms on the royal shield of Great Britain, which was done by George I. The coat-of-arms of the Graculis (who were dukes of Brunswick and Hanover, in Germany) in the shape of two lions and a white horse, appears on one of the quarters.

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Of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

PART 244. VOL. XL.

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How proud was I when, for my sake,
She left me in the lurch—
Her other sweethearts, who would fain
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'Tis many a year since there I strolled,
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S. J. P.—You have committed a great error by becoming entangled in a correspondence with a person of the opposite sex, who, as you confess, was a perfect stranger to you. Do not imagine, however, that he can force you into a marriage, there being no law in this or any other civilized country compelling such a course. Drop the correspondence immediately, and try to be more discreet hereafter. Young girls of your age especially should be very wary in directing their footsteps through the dangers which beset them on every side, and not open a correspondence with strangers "in fun," as you term it, which almost invariably ends in trouble.

K. L.—The best method, according to standard authorities, of bleaching feathers is the following:—The feathers are placed for from three to four hours in a tepid dilute solution of bichromate of potash, to which some nitric acid has been cautiously added. After this time has elapsed, it is found that the feathers have assumed a greenish hue, owing to an oxide precipitated upon their substance. In order to remove this, they are placed in a dilute solution of sulphurous acid in water, by which means they become perfectly white and bleached. Great care is taken that the bichromate solution is not made too strong, and more especially that too much nitric acid is not added, which would cause an indelible yellow colour.

STACE STRUCK.—Sims Reeves, the eminent tenor singer, was born at Woolwich in 1821. He displayed, at the early age of fourteen, a great deal of musical talent, and became a clever performer on various instruments, and tolerably well versed in composition. It was at this time he was appointed organist and director of the choir in the church of North Gray in Kent. He first appeared in public as a baritone in Newcastle, in 1839, scoring an immediate success. A short while after this, in order to perfect his voice and style, he went to Paris, and after studying there for some time, appeared at Milan in a tenor part, and created a perfect furore. Returning to England in 1847, he was immediately recognised as the best of all English tenors, and since then his career has been one continued success.

F. J. B.—There are various causes of rheumatism, such as sudden changes of temperature, exposure to draughts, sleeping in a damp bed, &c. It may also be hereditary, which, although not showing itself for years, will be suddenly developed by a slight cold. A faulty digestion is also a great cause of this troublesome and painful affliction. The precise nature of the poisonous principle introduced into the blood in such cases has never been satisfactorily determined, various theories being entertained by different physicians. It is generally believed to be what is known as lactic acid. It would be advisable in your case to consult the family physician, who is, no doubt, thoroughly acquainted with any predisposing causes existing in your family. See also Miscellaneous in the present number.

MAURA.—Ink-stains on books, paper, &c., may be removed successfully in a variety of ways. Nearly all the acids will remove spots of ink from paper; but it is necessary to employ such as will not injure its texture. Muratic acid, diluted in five or six times the quantity of water, may be applied with success upon the spot. After a minute or two it must be washed off with clean water. A weak solution of either tartaric, oxalic, or citric acid is attended with the least risk, and may be applied upon the paper without fear of damage. These acids taking out writing-ink can be used for restoring books where the margins have been written upon, without staining the text. Due care should be exercised in the handling of oxalic acid, as it is a very dangerous poison.

P. D.—The national symbol of England, in the olden time, was the rose; the shamrock, or clover, of Ireland; and the thistle, of Scotland. When England claimed Ireland and Scotland, these three symbols were united on the royal shield of Great Britain, as they were found in the time of Queen Elizabeth. After a victory over France, the symbol that of country was also added, the unicorn wearing a chain, to denote the subjection of France to England. When a new sovereign succeeds to the crown, he has a right to place his own family coat-of-arms on the royal shield of Great Britain, which was done by George I. The coat-of-arms of the Guelphs (who were dukes of Brunswick and Hanover, in Germany) in the shape of two lions and a white horse, appears on one of the quarterings.

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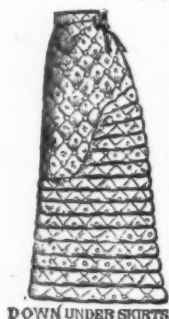
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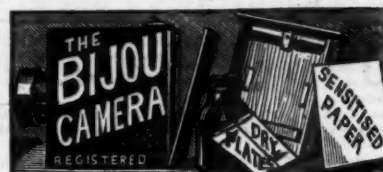
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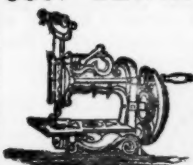
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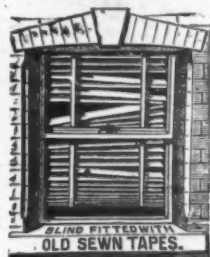
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